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BONNIE KATE.

BONNIE KATE

A STORY

FROM A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

. "Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
Oh no! it is an ever fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken,
It is the star to every wandering bark
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken."
SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS, No. 116.

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BONNIE KATE.

CHAPTER I.

DROMORE.

THEY were magnificent gate-posts ; tall and stately, built of grey stone, and one of them was crowned by a great, round, smooth globe of stone that one might fancy giants playing at marbles with. True, there was only one, but its fellow lay half buried in moss and periwinkle, and that wonderful “morning glory” that wraps everything in a mantle of green the moment it gets the chance, so that you could easily imagine what the general effect had been, and admire it in your “mind’s eye.” It may be objected that there were no gates.

True again, but reflect how much trouble in

the way of opening and shutting was saved by this simple fact. No getting down off the box and stopping the horse short to its manifest discontent ; no stopping ; but in you went with one smooth, uninterrupted swing, through the garden, and up to the portals of Dromore. There was no fear that you should make any mistake in the name of the house, for there it was written up, twice over, once on each gate-post.

Lichens and moss grew all over these tall, massive gate-posts, showing beautiful patches of colour, russet - red, and olive - green, and pearly-grey ; but these soft hues were the tints of decay, the dregs left by the passing of the river of time ; the signs of neglect, of poverty, of a piteous decadence, of cruel fall from a once high estate.

The carriage - way that led through these time - embossed portals was carpeted with fine grass, down-pressed by no rolling wheels, nor, save for one narrow pathway, by the tread of feet. The daisies grew amongst it at their will ; here and there the periwinkle and the morning glory stretched out a long arm half-

way across it, and, midway to the house, a clump of bold-faced celandines had taken up a prominent position almost in the centre of it. The house itself was of stone, with deep mulioned windows, and a crazy porch, of which one pillar had fallen away, and the architrave with it, which gave a notion of instability to those newly introduced to it. People familiar with it would have laughed at such a notion. Had not Dromore been like that ever since anyone could remember? No one would believe in it being Dromore at all if it were neat and taut, and all in straight lines like other houses; and as to the garden, why, it had run wild so long, and become such a tangle of greenery and blossoms, that it possessed all the grace and beauty of some wild creature never tamed by the hand of man, nor yet likely to be.

Opposite the house, under a cedar tree, was a long, wide stone-bench, broken somewhat at one end, to be in keeping with the rest of its surroundings, but kept from being smothered up in teeming vegetation by the shadow of the cedar above it. This bench was a pleasant

place enough in summer time, when the soft, balmy air that is softer and balmier in Ireland than in any other country in the world, buffeted your face gently and tenderly, and the sunshine peeped at you shyly through the covert of the level cedar boughs.

There was a unique peculiarity about the large mullioned window with three lights that flanked the right side of the porch at Dromore. A sort of table, fitted in exactly to the bend of the sill, ran all the way round it, and here were displayed all sorts of little knitted garments—hoods and socks, and tiny petticoats about as deep as your hand, apparently only fit for dolls; also what are called “samples” in wool-work—that is, pretty, delicately-traced patterns on canvas, with just one corner worked in to show what the whole would be like. Tiny china saucers were set at distances round these tables, each containing marvellously-tinted beads of different sizes and shapes, and a shallow, open work - basket of silver and plated thimbles completed the show. Not, however, that these pretty articles were all

that was to be seen through the rose-wreathed window.

Two snow-white Quaker caps, clipping round two gentle faces with hair put simply back beneath the Puritan headgear—two dear gentlewomen, each with a small white shawl pinned with mathematical exactness over gowns the colour of the lichens on the old stone walls—gowns so straight and plain they hardly seemed to show a fold—these were what was to be seen through the mullioned window.

Dear friends, from out the far dim past let your gentle figures rise before me, and dower my pen with skill to limn your portraits tenderly and well!

The word “gentlewomen” is set down advisedly to describe these sisters, even though the long table, near which one or other or both might generally be seen, came perilously near that bar sinister, the counter. Not softer were the many-hued wools they dealt in than the hands that knitted them so deftly; not purer were the hanks of snowy “fleecy” than the hearts that beat beneath the prim

white shawls and closely-fitting gowns of grey.

Faith and Prudence Worthy were the names of these two inmates of Dromore ; but the last name was seldom heard, as Friend Faith and Friend Prudence did duty for all else.

Of the former it may be said that her name was her truest emblem. Hers was one of those calm and chastened souls we meet with at times in this world to assure us of the existence of the one that is spiritual and unseen. It is as if we came upon the inhabitant of a strange and far country, and that country should become to us real and vivid, though our eyes had never seen it, because of the stranger and pilgrim who sojourned in our midst.

One might well fancy that something of the childlike and devout spirit of the weaver's son, the lonely shepherd full of mystic communings with God and Nature, who first founded the Society of Friends, had descended upon Faith Worthy and taken up its abode in her heart.

A reserved and self-disciplined enthusiast, it seemed not so much that she had to turn to

her religion for guidance and comfort as to something outside herself, as that its light ever burned with steady and enduring flame, part and parcel of herself, embodied and materialised in her life and thoughts.

There were occasions, few and far between, when Friend Faith spoke at meeting—occasions never to be forgotten by those who were present; times and seasons when her hearers seemed lifted out of this world altogether, and led into the actual warmth and light of the Peace of God which passeth all understanding. Through pinching poverty, through family trials of quite extraordinary acuteness, the still shining of this heavenly peace had never faded from Faith Worthy's heart; the lamp had never even flickered. If her cheek was thin, if the knuckles on her helpful hands were too plainly visible, if everything about her spoke of that most pathetic of all kinds of poverty—never having quite enough, no one ever heard her murmur.

Neither, for that matter, was Friend Prudence given to grumbling, but there was a

faint spice of a gentle sort of worldliness about Miss Prudence (the "Miss" comes handier to her). She was ten years her sister's junior, and in a bygone day a pretty, demure little face had been discernible under that deep pent-house, her Quaker bonnet. Even now she wore her cap and shawl "with a difference," and was not unconscious of sloping shoulders, a delicate waist, that fifty winters had not robbed her of, and a "crinkle" in the still brown hair that no amount of cold water would smooth out—even if she had wished it should, which may be doubted.

Friend Faith believed that no such beautiful creature as her sister Prudence had ever been seen ; but she regarded this fact as a thing never to be alluded to, and, indeed, was wont to check herself in the inclination to feel some pride in it. "Favour is deceitful and beauty vain." Friend Faith was familiar enough with those words of one whose experience gives him a right to be heard, but for all that, the knowledge did not prevent her from time to time casting a shy glance of pride and approval at

Friend Prudence in her Sabbath gown and grey bonnet, beneath which the cheek was still soft and round, and the dark eyes bright as they were thirty years ago.

Simple, active, temperate lives leave few lines as traces of their passing ; and a certain youthfulness may be extended even to the verge of old age. The brunt of all the family trouble among the Worthys had always fallen upon the elder sister ; she had screened the younger one as much as possible from the blasts of misfortune, and many a time and oft in the days gone by, by quiet and secret self-denial, had she devised little luxuries and dainties for pretty Prudence.

There was no handmaid kept at Dromore. Thrice a week or so, a person who called herself Biddy came in to do a certain amount of rough cleaning. Biddy was an Irishwoman of the truest type. Her mouth seemed to reach nearly from ear to ear ; her nose was latent in the bridge, and well-developed at the wide, upturned tip ; her smile ready, her willingness unfailing ; her heart a heart of gold ; and her

ways leaving much to be desired as to order and method. The simplest child of Irish Catholicism, she was as full of picturesque superstitions as an egg is full of meat; and nothing could well be more racy, had anyone been there to enjoy it, than the contrast of Biddy and the Quaker surroundings of Dro-more. She would cross herself if she came upon a hand-basin left with standing water in it over-night. Were not the fairies known to have their haunts where such negligence existed? If she overset a chair (and such an occurrence was by no means rare) she was in great consternation to think that "the devil was laughing"—though the why and the wherefore of this droll behaviour on his part appeared somewhat inexplicable. To hear Biddy recounting these marvellous articles of belief to Friend Faith, and to see Friend Faith's tender toleration of the same—that was pretty too.

Once when Prudence was sick—sick, as it seemed, nigh unto death—Biddy kept vigil for ten long days and nights, always made up

into a strange bundle of clothes, always willing, zealous, full of the true, passionate sympathy that only those of her nation can give — the sympathy that is so upholding because it folds about you like a loving arm ; and when Friend Faith urged upon her the necessity of sleep, replied that “ Sure she could sleep on one leg like a burred, for matter of that,” and was none the worse for never seeing the inside of her bed.

One thing was an awful scare to Biddy in those days of sorrow and waiting. She was used to the wildest outpourings of grief—the “ keen ” of the mourner, the awful croon of those who watch by the dead ; but to peep into the sparsely-furnished room that was Friend Faith’s, and see the motionless figure of that dear lady seated with folded hands and tearless face, white as that of a statue, and as still—to see her with lips that never stirred nor made a moan, with no beads to tell, and no book to read out of, with nothing but those pale, folded hands and calm, up-looking eyes.

“ You might have knocked me down wid a

feather the first time I caught sight of her," said Biddy, in the privacy of her own home. "And, sure, it was spakin' wid the blessed saints she was, and down I fell on my knees in the passage, and up with a prayer to the blessed St Joseph, who hears us in sorrow ; an' —glory be to God !—that night Miss Prudence she mended, and I clean lost my senses for joy, and had liked to have kissed Miss Faith on both of her cheeks, but held back for fear, and just kissed the spalpeen of a dog that steals every bone in the larder instead."

The rapt woman holding silent communion with the spirit that ruled her life—with the God from whose verdict she recognised no appeal ; and there, outside in the twilight, the passionate-hearted Celt, importuning High Heaven according to her lights, with tears, and sighs, and strange ejaculations. . . .

What a picture—what a contrast—and how beautiful the sympathy that drew together the widely diverse leadings like a golden link !

It has been said that Faith Worthy sheltered her sister as much as might be from the

burden and pain of family sorrows and trials ; but there was one “ skeleton in the cupboard ” at Dromore that neither could ignore—that was their brother Benjamin. In age he came between the two ; in appearance he “ favoured ” his sister Prudence ; for the rest——

Well, let us sketch him as he sat on the wide stone bench under the cedar-tree, his dog and inseparable companion “ Yap ” by his side.

Friend Benjamin wore the Quaker habit, the wide-brimmed hat, the long Puritan coat. Every article of his attire was a marvel of neatness and cleanliness, a wonder of patchings almost invisible from the skill with which they were put in—of being turned and made the best of—of being smoothed, and brushed, and generally brightened up.

From under the broad brim of his hat fell lint-white locks, white with a silvery whiteness, like spun glass in the sunshine, showing startingly against the sombre brown of his coat. When he turned his face towards you

you saw that these venerable locks surrounded the face of a child. The eyes pale-blue and widely-opened, vacant, dreamy; the mouth loose-lipped, ever smiling; the cheek and chin smooth as a woman's; the voice high-pitched and boyish: such was Benjamin Worthy, even from his birth until now. And all through the long years, since the mother died when Prudence was but a stripling girl, he had been the precious charge, the tenderly-cherished child—for indeed he was no more—of the two sisters, the one haunting fear of their lives being that in some day of dread and terror he might be forcibly taken from their keeping. Year by year they had watched the strange malady, the “cloud,” as someone too truthfully put it, that hovered over his life, fitfully changing from better to worse, and at times—times that strained the calm faith of the elder sister as did no other affliction—rising to a flood, then ebbing when fears were at the highest.

Ireland is the home of the cultus of the “natural.” To show discourtesy, to speak a

hard word, to one who is "simple," is to bring the dreaded "bad luck" upon yourself. A person so afflicted might wander from one end of the country to the other and meet with nothing but kindness. To the people—many of them poor and half-starved—round about Dromore, Friend Benjamin was a sacred creature. To present him with fruit or flowers was looked upon as a high privilege by the simple peasants, and in his own half-witted way he enjoyed this popularity ; even making friends with the jolly-faced priest of the little church near the sea—for we are in a small sort of settlement half-way between the big city of Dublin and the coast—and that kindly-hearted man would remind his people that the "invincible ignorance" of this gentle, harmless one set him in quite a different category from other more knowledgeable "heretics." This verdict upon poor Benjamin's spiritual state naturally heightened the estimation in which he was held by the good folks of Green Dales, by which name the clusters of hovels and cottages, and the one or two houses of

more pretension scattered about here and there, were known.

And well did the place deserve its name—no greener or more verdant spot could well be imagined: worthy, indeed, was it of being a portion of the island that is well called emerald. There is a softness about the climate of Ireland, seen indeed, to its highest extent in lovely Glengariff and fair Killarney, but perceptible all over the country. If her skies shed many tears—and God wot, she has had sorrows enough to weep for!—her smile is so sweet and bright you are in love with a land that has much of changeful April in its nature, combined with the softness of Italy or Mentone; and between smiles and tears the lovely blossoms are born, and the emerald grass and waving trees clothe the earth with a beauty never to be forgotten.

All this verdure was in its fulness, for the summer approached its zenith, when Friend Benjamin sat on the wide stone bench with Yap, the dog, by his side.

Now a word of Yap. Introduced with an

apology, because of the long string of dogs to be found among the *dramatis personæ* of this story, but also presented to the reader in the full confidence that he will win his way—his prototype always did, even with those who considered themselves by no means “dog lovers”—and further allowed to make his bow to the British Public—with a big B and a big P, since both Yap and I hope to make a very considerable circle of acquaintances—because the portrait of his gentle master would be incomplete without him.

Yap had evidently intended to be a broken-haired terrier, but had failed to realise his ideal. Still, the intention was apparent, and ought to count, for good intentions always seem to me to count for something, and should rather be compared to blighted buds that might have been flowers, rather than to stones to pave a certain allegorical place of abode. We will therefore credit poor Yap with wishing to be better than he was. He had a small white body, a long tail (alas!), and two yellow-brown ears, one of which he generally

carried very much up, and the other very much down, while his small black eyes took in everything with a marvellous acuteness. Yap was a knowing beast in his way, and as he did not pretend to set up business in anybody else's way, no reproach could attach to him on that score.

He looked supernaturally knowing on the present occasion, having absented himself from his master's side for a while, returned, looked wistfully at the figure on the bench, and given a short sharp bark of appeal, as who should say :

“ I wish you would attend to what I want to say to you, and not give all your attention to those tiresome pictures.”

For Friend Benjamin was what is called “clever with his fingers,” and had a knack of cutting out birds, beasts, and fishes in black paper, and pinning them up along the wall of his own little room, an apartment which presented somewhat the appearance of an inanimate zoological gardens, in which all the animals had gone into mourning for deceased relatives.

He was just now most carefully rounding the corner of an elephant's ear, and failed for the moment to notice Yap's agitated demeanour.

As he at last looked up, the little animal leapt from the bench, and began to jump about and bark, making short runs half-way down the grassy carriage-way towards the gate-posts, and then back again.

Even to his master's dim intelligence it dawned at last that Yap had some mighty game on hand.

Friend Benjamin, with much difficulty, pulled a huge sort of pocket-book out of his coat-flap, tenderly folded the black paper elephant between two of the leaves, and looked inquiringly down at the dog, who was making a dancing dervish of himself. When he rose to his feet Yap went into an ecstasy, and the two disappeared round the curve of the pathway. The evening was coming on, and more than an hour ago Friend Faith and Friend Prudence had pulled down the blinds in the mullioned window, and closed the outer door

of the crazy porch. These proceedings meant that business was over, and soon the two sisters were counting over the few—very few—shillings that represented the “take” of the day. This “take” varied considerably, a wet or cold day reducing it so low as one solitary shilling; a bright, sunny afternoon often resulting in quite a rush of customers.

For the kindly gentlewomen were known and beloved far and near, and were sometimes bidden to tea to this hospitable board or that, an invitation never accepted by both, though occasionally by one. On one occasion, a strong desire having been expressed by a visitor to make the acquaintance of both ladies, Friend Faith arrived to tea, then retired, and was succeeded by Friend Prudence.

The simple and pathetic reason for this “one in and one out” arrangement was that only one really good and undarned gown—a marvellous garment indeed, of pearl-grey Irish Poplin—was possessed by the two, and neither felt it showing proper respect to the hostess of the house to appear

in a garment otherwise than seemly and suitable.

"People put such funny things in novels!" cries some reader at this.

True, my friend, whoever you may be; but now and again the oddest things they write are simple, unvarnished realities, and of these this last is one.

Fancy the sister left at home, waiting in calm patience, with hair and cap neatly adjusted, for the return of the other—and the gown! Fancy the putting of it off, the putting of it on, the little touch here and there given by the first wearer of it to make all complete and trim for the second!

There is poverty in the world that has a more pathetic side than that of the beggar in the street, even though his rags hang never so pitifully, for he does not feel the sting of poverty as the more cultured do, nor does his pride bleed at seeking charity as would theirs.

The unpretending wool-shop closed for the day, the sisters betook themselves to an inner room.

Here again the pathetic story of refined poverty was written in plainest letters.

Every article that could by any possibility be looked upon as superfluous had long since been weeded out and disposed of. During that long illness of poor Prue's, of which mention has already been made, very many knick-knacks and pretty things disappeared from Dromore.

Each room in turn went through this thinning process ; several old pictures, relics of a family state long gone by, went by the carrier to Dublin, the said carrier proving himself a perfect gentleman by affecting absolute ignorance of the nature of the packages he conveyed, even while condoling with Biddy in secret upon the sad straits of the two dear ladies she so faithfully served.

There were no comfortable lounges, no cushioned reclining chairs at Dromore in these days, only a stony-hearted horsehair couch that shone with age till it looked at a distance as if it were made of ebony, and a quaint old wooden chair, with knitted rests for head and

arms, a work of art considered to reflect great credit upon Friend Prue's ingenuity.

A long table with some tastefully-arranged flowers in a delf bowl, a knitting-table, with big bellying bag down below, and a cupboard, plain and serviceable, which held the household stores — if such a word could apply to such small garnerage—that was about all.

Curtains there were none. But the two upper panes of each window were of coloured glass, and gave a richness and glow to the interior, and made a picturesque glow behind the white-capped figures and the dove-coloured gowns.

Friend Faith sat in the cushioned chair, a white silk handkerchief spread across her lap so that the delicate wools she handled might escape even the slightest soil. Idleness was a thing unknown at Dromore.

It was hard enough to make a profit out of the little hoods and petticoats, and dainty neck-scarves and clouds, when the material was paid for, even if you worked nearly every

spare moment; but Prue had been a little fragile since that long illness, and Faith had ruled that, when business hours were over, she should recline for half an hour on the shining horsehair sofa before she set herself to prepare the evening meal that was tea and supper all in one.

She lay there now—a slender figure against the black—weary with standing to serve at the “table,” as the improvised counter was called, and conscious of an ache in her back, and an all too worldly longing for something tasty and “nice” for tea—a longing that she knew was a thing to be sternly repressed.

Friend Faith, slender too, but upright as a dart, was busy plying her crochet-needle. In and out, in and out, went the little ivory hook, and lo! a charming rose-pink bordering appeared on the frill of a baby’s hood—a hood that must have been meant for a gay and worldly baby, not a Quakerly brat by any means.

“Where is Benjamin, dost thou know,

Prue ? ” said Friend Faith, with a keen glance over the edge of the said hood, and an anxious pucker in her forehead.

“ I fancied him a little restless after dinner-hour ; I shall go and seek him in the garden presently, if he does not come.”

Prue raised her head, listening.

“ I hear Yap’s bark. Benjamin cannot well be far off.”

“ I often wonder what our brother did before we got Yap,” said Friend Faith ; “ the little creature has been a good gift of God.”

Now, the said gift was bestowed in the following way :

Yap appeared, draggled, dirty, indigent-looking to the last degree, before the sitting-room window while the family were at their frugal breakfast.

He must have had great faith in the human kindness he appealed to, for he laid his head on the ledge of the low window, and gave a disconsolate whine.

Then they looked at him, and found that he went on three legs instead of four—in a word,

one of his hind-legs was broken, and hung pitiably.

It was soon set, and Yap lying comfortably on the well-worn rug, drinking with evident zest and relish the share of the milk that rightfully ought to have belonged to Friend Faith, that dear soul sipping her milkless coffee with the utmost content and simplicity of purpose.

After this, of course, Yap found a home at Dromore, and each day developed in him qualities of the most endearing kind.

Another gift of Heaven came to Dromore in the form of a thrush, mauled cruelly by an evil-disposed cat, and rescued from that animal's jaws by Benjamin himself. This creature, too, was resuscitated, and paid his dole of tuneful song for the hospitality he received.

And so it came to pass that these three dear people, who had hard work to keep the food in their own mouths, managed to feed also the two needy creatures that misfortune had driven to Dromore for sanctuary.

Even now, as Prue listened for her brother's step, the mellow piping of the thrush—who had never fully recovered from his mauling, and could not have provided for himself if he had been turned loose—made itself heard in Biddy's kitchen.

Then there was a crunching on the grassy gravel, a pull at the porch door, and Benjamin Worthy came in, Yap at his heels, of course.

Whatever doubt there might be about his master's state of mind, there could be none as to the restlessness of Yap. He ran round the room, sniffed at this and that, whined a little squeaking whine, and stood with one paw in air and his left ear cocked at an absolutely absurd angle.

As for Benjamin, he stole across the room in the most wonderful manner, as if he were treading upon eggs. He kept putting his finger to his lips and saying :

“ Hush, hush ! keep silence every one—keep silence ! Lie down, Yap, and do not stir. Hush, my dog, hush ! ”

A spasm of pain passed over Friend Prue's face. She had not yet learned the stern self-discipline of the elder sister. If Friend Faith's sunken cheek grew a shade whiter, it was all the emotion she allowed herself to show. This trial of theirs was very bitter.

For days, sometimes for weeks, their brother would be almost—never quite, but still almost—like other people. He would talk comparatively sensibly; he would recognise his own identity and theirs; then, all at once, like water suddenly stirred and troubled, the “cloud” came over him.

There was no limit to the extravagant fancies that would then possess him; there was no limit to the suffering of those who watched him. They would try to get him to his own room, and to keep him there.

Sometimes they would succeed; sometimes not; sometimes he would wander to the woods and fields, or to the shallow, sandy shore; Heaven only knows where he would go or how he would be brought back to them.

It was but a week ago that one of these "spells" had left him — physically a little feeble, as they always did, but sane, and still their own.

And now, what weird fancy was about to seize him and hold him as of old the evil spirits were said to hold men in possession?

"Thou hadst better seek the tea," said Faith, still plying her ivory hook, and, by a great effort, keeping her hand from trembling, and the rose-pink border from destruction.

Prue rose quickly, but her brother hastily placed himself between her and the door, moving back until he rested against it, and holding up his finger to command the silence of the world.

"Hush!" he said, speaking in a whisper that thrilled his hearers; "she is asleep among the daisies; thee will wake her."

Poor Prue wrung her hands. She was not very strong-minded, poor Prue, and she dreaded these spells with an almost morbid dread, and with a dread that grew.

“Some day,” she would say to Faith, “they will take him from us ; they will put him somewhere where we cannot see him ; and, Faith ! Faith ! I shall die.”

“Nay, thou wilt not,” would Faith reply. “God would uphold thee even in that sea of bitterness. He cannot fail us, and His Holy Spirit would abide with us and strengthen us.”

But Prue could not rise to these heights. Even now she trembled so that Faith dreaded Benjamin would notice it, and had they not been told to hide all signs of fear from him ?

He seemed to quiet down for a while, though nothing made Yap less fussy ; and the tea came in, and they took their places at table.

But Benjamin never touched the food set before him. He was listening all the while, his head raised, his eyes opened wide.

Then he got up all at once, and, parrot-like, repeated the old words : “She is asleep among the daisies. Hush ! thee will awake her — hush !”

Even Faith felt a chill shudder run through her veins.

Truly this was some wondrous new and strange delusion, and whence came it?

Awhile the simple creature stood turning his head from side to side, Yap watching him in an agony of impatience.

“She will be cold,” he said; “cold—it will grow dark—she will be cold.”

He stole a-tiptoe to the sofa, lifted a little white netted shawl that lay there by chance, hugged it to his bosom, and stole from the room, Yap following, distancing him and rushing madly down the drive.

The sisters looked at one another, rose at the same moment, and passed out into the lovely dying light of the summer even-tide.

Down the grassy way, on to the tall gate-posts, hoping against hope that he would return and meet them, hand-in-hand, for consolation, like two troubled children, they took their way, and then——

Was Brother Benjamin so very mad as people said? Anyway, there was “method in his madness.”

For, all among the daisies, just inside the gateway, lay a prone figure dressed all in black, while beside her knelt Benjamin; her head had fallen back upon his knee, the black bonnet had dropped to the ground, and the glory of a ruddy coronal of bright brown hair was caught by the dying radiance of the sunset, that lit up the deathly pallor of a weary woman's face.

Yap was wildly licking the lifeless hand that hung by her side, only ceasing to look yearningly up into Faith's face for help.

In a moment they were kneeling about her on the green tangle.

Friend Faith touched her face, and spoke, bending low to her.

"Friend," she said, "friend, what aileth thee? Canst thou not speak and tell us?"

At that the woman opened her eyes, brown and lustrous, but with a strange filmy look, as if they saw not what they looked upon. She pressed her hand to her brow and gazed with a puzzled stare upon the group around her.

“I am tired,” she said, “I have lost my way ; I came by the bridge ; the field of poppies looked red in the sun ;—and the little bird came down to the stone to drink . . . such a little, little bird . . . but the hill is too steep—I cannot reach the church ; I hear the bells, but they sound very far away . . .”

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE LIFE.

“SURE an’ it’s a drop o’ the cratur would put new life into her. She’s too wake entoirely—that’s what ails her,” said Biddy.

But there was no such thing as a “drop o’ the cratur” to be found within the walls of Dromore, and there was the strange lady who had truly been found “asleep among the daisies,” lying all along on the shiny horsehair sofa without sense or motion, Friend Faith laving her poor white face with spring water, Prue standing by in sore perplexity, and Friend Benjamin carrying on a hushed yet agitated conversation with Yap, whom he had caught, and was holding on to, as a sort of anchor in a storm-tossed time.

Everyone was very glad that Biddy had appeared upon the scene; for the ladies of

Dromore found themselves placed in a new and most trying position, with all the traditions of their quiet lives of daily routine scattered to the winds.

Who could have foreseen an hour ago that such a break in the every-day existence at Dromore would come about ?

And what were they to do ?

It appeared as if their involuntary guest were about to revive when they found her by the gateway, for though her speech was rambling, she had been able to rise with the help of kindly arms, and had walked, with a good deal of assistance truly, yet cleverly enough, up the grass-grown drive, and into the pleasant dwelling-room.

She had a strangely dazed and bewildered look about her, but smiled as Friend Benjamin took her hand, and led her, as one might lead a little child, across the threshold of Dromore.

“Verily, thou art ill,” said Friend Faith, leading her to the sofa ; “thou must rest awhile.”

It was to be a long, long rest ; for even as

she answered, "I have walked too far, and the hill is steep. You can see the church up against the sky—the bells sound so sweet—they are ringing now," their strange guest lay gently back and fell once more into a deathly swoon; a swoon so like death, that Prue wrung her hands in helpless bewilderment, and Benjamin, whispering to his chief friend and counsellor, said with an awed kind of whimper:

"It is Our Lady, our Lady of Sorrows; the sorrows have killed her, they have pierced her heart. Yap, listen! We must get some flowers, pretty and sweet, to strew above her, and a little lamp to burn upon her grave, and shine like a star out in the dark, dark night. Thee knowest, Yap?—like those in the graveyard by the sea."

In their wide wanderings together, these two, master and dog, had seen strange things, and made acquaintance, as the saying goes, with strange bedfellows. Benjamin's feeble mind had picked up and held on to various quirks and fancies, and was now an incon-

gruous mass of ideas, disjointed yet vivid, in many ways reflecting the beliefs and superstitions of the simple peasantry of the neighbouring village. No one ever contradicted Friend Benjamin, for contradiction was a thing that drove him to frenzy; a fact long since fully recognised by the people round about Dromore; so that no freer, more uncontrolled creature could exist than the man with the face of a child, and—so said the folks—the heart of an angel. He came and he went, he was welcome everywhere. He wandered into the ever open churches, he imitated the gestures of the worshippers, he picked up the phrases and shibboleths of a faith as absolutely opposed to Quakerism as a faith could be, and no one had a fault to find, or a carping word to say.

He was a “natural”; he was under the special care of Heaven; to molest him in any way was to make yourself an equal reprobate with the deceiver of the dying or the robber of the dead.

When Miles O’Flanagan’s child that was

subject to fits was, by the advice of a most cunning and knowledgeable personage, laid in a gravel-pit with its feet towards the rising sun, and four Paternosters said at its head and four Glorias at either hand, when much good resulted, it was openly stated that nothing contributed to the efficacy of the treatment more than the fact that "the gentleman" of Dromore gravely assisted at the function.

Indeed Friend Benjamin had taken the deepest interest in it all, muttering and gesticulating with the best. That he was subsequently found to be under the impression that he had been assisting at a funeral did not detract from the general satisfaction in the least. It only proved how truly "simple" he was, and the bunches of grass and wild flowers that he brought to strew upon the supposed corpse were cherished as sacred relics.

So now when Biddy heard him address the poor creature who lay in their midst all white and stirless as our Lady of Sorrows, she crossed herself with that celerity and ease that none

but your true-bred Catholic ever attains to, and stored up this new instance of a natural's occult sayings to edify her belongings with presently.

Meanwhile, faithful Biddy's suggestion as to that "drop o' the cratur" that was not forthcoming fell to the ground. There could, of course, have been no better or wiser suggestion, only the means to carry it out were lacking, and, there being no better substitutes, cold water from the little spring that tinkled so musically at the bottom of the garden, and a bottle of pungent salts—a relic of Prue's indisposition—had to do duty for what was lacking. Nature doubtless assisted, for she is the most skilled and cunning of physicians, and at last the stranger opened her eyes and looked up at Friend Faith.

That struggling back to consciousness is a terrible process, as all of us who have passed through it know full well. It is sometimes hard to be duly grateful to those who drag us back to life through such a painful process, and we would fain entreat them to let us float

away again into that cloudland where erstwhile we lay as a child asleep on the mother's lap.

"Glory be to God!" cried Biddy, down on her knees in a trice; "she's wakin'; in a bit she'll be after spakin'! Praise be to the Blessed Saints!"

"Get up, Biddy," said Friend Faith, in a matter-of-fact voice that contrasted oddly enough with the emotional accents of the Irishwoman; "go into the kitchen and fetch a cup of hot broth from the pot."

They were very poor these ladies of Dromore, but the world—especially the world around them—held those who were poorer still.

The small remnant left from their own store was itself stored up, and no wayfarer who came to the door of the crazy porch to beg for "a sup and a bit" was allowed to leave unsatisfied.

Hence the stranger who had fallen at their very gates came in for a share of this their charity; and the warm soup seemed to act as well as any "drop o' the cratur" that ever was distilled.

A faint tinge of colour came to the fair, pale cheek ; a soft light to the heavy eyes.

“I do not know who you are,” said Kate (in sorry plight, it must be confessed, and hardly entitled to the name of “Bonnie” any more), “but you are very kind—very good to me.”

“We are Friends,” said Friend Faith.

Kate looked from one to the other of the kindly capped faces, and then across to poor Benjamin, who in his absence of mind had somehow wrapped Yap round in the small netted shawl he had taken possession of before to shield Kate from the cold of the coming night, and was holding the little dog in his arms like a baby.

“*He* was my first friend,” she said, with a tiny, sad little smile. “I felt myself falling, and through the mist I saw him coming to me.”

At this Benjamin returned to his old refrain.

“She was asleep among the daisies, wasn’t she, Yap? We saw her, didn’t we, my lad? Our Lady of Sorrows was asleep among the daisies.”

A flush stole up to the neat parting of Prue's hair. She was at all times ultra-sensitive about her brother's affliction, and now what would the stranger think?

But the words uttered in Benjamin's high-pitched piping voice met with a response little expected.

"You are quite right," said Kate, as the tears started and fell; "quite—quite right. That name suits me well—very, very well."

Then, with a startled look round the unfamiliar room, she made an effort to rise from the couch, but Friend Faith's firm hand pressed her gently back.

"Nay," she said; "thou art not rested enough to rise yet awhile. Take some more of the soup and sop a bit of bread in it; methinks thou hast fasted over long."

"Indeed I have, and I have lost all my things. I had a bag, and I do not know where it is gone, but my money is safe here," laying her hand upon her bosom; "all this must seem very strange to you, I know, but I cannot well say more."

“Thou hast no need to,” said Faith Worthy ;
“we are not of those who seek to look
into that which is hidden. Thou art sick
and weary ; we do but wish to succour
thee.”

“I came to Ireland to seek out a friend,”
went on Kate, embarrassed by the position in
which she found herself, and touched by the
delicacy and tenderness of her new friends ;
“I thought—nay, I was sure—she was living
in Dublin, but I found the house empty, dark,
and desolate. Then I wandered about I know
not where, and everything round me seemed
to grow dim and misty—my strength failed
me. I——” (here she passed her hand across
her brow, and gave a long, shuddering sigh)
“I fancied I was at Low Cross and had lost
my way. Even now the mist seems closing in
upon me once again ; your kind faces are all
dim and indistinct ; your voices seem to reach
me from somewhere far away. Can I stay
here for a night’s rest ? I am very lonely and
desolate ; I will not give you much trouble.
Do not turn me out until the night is passed.

Last night the way was so dark and long ; the hill to the church is steep, but heaven is nearer when you reach the summit ; you can see the hills purple and gold, and the green, green wolds stretched out at your feet. I shall get there presently, but just now I am too tired ; indeed I am. . . .”

Friend Faith was kneeling by the couch, and had her arm beneath the drooping head.

She recognised that the enfeebled body was acting on the mind, that the wandering thoughts were all disjointed, “like sweet bells jangled out of tune ;” not Benjamin himself at the time of his worst spells could be more helpless, more wholly thrown upon their tender mercies than this poor girl—for she was little more—struck down in the midst of her weary wanderings.

What those wanderings might mean, what strange and pitiful story might underlie this wonderful rent in the even tenor of their own peaceful, uneventful lives, Faith Worthy never once stopped to question. If it were good that she should know of these things, why,

then the knowledge would be given her. If not, she was content to leave the mystery unsolved, to work in the darkness, so long as that work meant the succouring of the unfortunate, the giving of help and comfort where both were needed.

She would have told you that when the Divine Man, Christ Jesus, walked this earth of ours, and came upon those who were sick and afflicted, we have no record that He asked them any questions as to their life or sorrows ; we have no record that He stayed to assure Himself they were worthy objects of His magnificence of compassion : rather He healed them even in passing—healed them, as it were, in the same moment that He became aware of their necessities.

In her, therefore—humbly treading in the Saviour's footsteps—was no curiosity, no longing to spy out sin, and so find an excuse to deny succour. The recipient of her charity was answerable to God, not to her ; she had only her own plain duty to do—that duty to fall away from which would be the deadliest of

sins against the light that shines from the face beneath the Crown of Thorns.

It seemed as if poor bewildered Kate understood the silent assurance of that protecting and supporting arm that had been slipped beneath her head.

She lay back against it trustfully, and Prue fanned her weary face with a great palm-leaf fan, and found the while a secret pleasure in such an exciting and romantic episode as the advent of a stranger into their midst. For Prue's heart was young still, and the romance that had never had full vent lay latent there, ready to start into life. She was sure—very, very sure, though she would not have whispered such a fancy to her sister Faith—that quite a wonderful story would come to light one of these days about this Lady of Sorrows, whom Benjamin had found “asleep among the daisies.” Sister Faith was very strict about the books that were read at Dromore ; but Prue was of a mind to think, that seeing a romance acted before your very eyes, and beneath your very roof, was to be

preferred to reading the most thrilling story in a book. All at once a look of fear and pain passed over the face of the stranger. She caught Biddy's hand and held it tight.

Biddy, who had drawn near, was watching the lady with a new and startled intentness, and at last, after many muttered invocations to many saints, and various upliftings of hands and eyes, she bent forward to whisper in Friend Faith's ear.

Then her earnestness and fear getting the better of her, Biddy flung caution to the winds.

"For the love of God," she said, twisting her apron into a rope and wringing it hard, "get her up the stairs and settled in her bed. I'll be afther seeking the 'wise woman' the while—the saints be good to the lot of us this night!"

Friend Faith unhooked the bunch of keys from her girdle, and handed them to Prue.

"Go," she said, "get clean linen from the press, and settle my bed ready for her, and, Biddy, do thou hasten on thy errand."

Twisting the corner of her shawl over her tousled head, Biddy was off like the arrow from the bow, and in wondrous short time Prue had all in readiness in the chamber above, and, between them, Friend Faith and she had roused the stranger from the cloud of stupor that seemed to be wrapping her round once more, had led her by easy stages up the wide and shallow stairs, undressed her with tender, helpful hands, and laid her to rest in the lavender-scented room, where all was so poor, yet all so shiningly white and clean.

The blind was lowered, a slender candle burned upon the mantel, and Friend Faith had taken up her post as watcher by the bed, when Prue, hovering near, raised the left hand that lay so lifeless and inert upon the knitted coverlet.

There on the slim white finger was the plain golden circlet. Friend Faith gently covered both ring and hand with her own.

“If it had not been so she would only have needed our help and compassion the more, thee knows.”

Prue blushed as hotly as though it had been her own fair name and fame under discussion. It was no new thing to her to feel both worldly and worldly-wise before the sublime simplicity of the other's large-hearted charity.

It was not long before Biddy was back, accompanied by an individual not unlike herself multiplied by four—as kindly, as full of sympathy, as ready with devotional appeals to all the saints of the calendar, and quite as incongruous in that household of Friends.

Towards midnight Prue came stealing down the stairs to Benjamin keeping solitary vigil with Yap curled up at his feet, and told him that the lady was ill—very ill—and Yap must not be allowed to bark, no matter what cats or other vermin made eerie rustlings in the shrubberies.

Prue was followed by her sister Faith, bearing in her hand a purse.

Friend Faith looked grave indeed, so grave that neither of the others cared to speak to her.

She opened the clasp of the purse, took out a roll of notes and some gold, counted each

note thus : “ One, two, three, four, five,” each for twenty pounds ; then the sovereigns, ten in all ; opened her desk, placed the money in safe custody, and turned the key upon it : all this being done in silence, but so that all there should see.

Benjamin gave such a start at the sight of so much money that Yap made preparations to bark, and had to be promptly smothered. He knew that those rustling bits of paper and small yellow coins meant many, many shillings. He realised that when shillings were few in the little money-box after the day’s business, food was scant and coarse at Dromore ; and visions of mighty feasts—to which he had already resolved to bid all his surrounding friends, including Miles O’Flanagan and his numerous family — would result from this marvellous store. But Benjamin “gave his thoughts no tongue.”

There was that in Faith’s white face that held him silent.

It was not fear ; it may indeed be questioned whether the chastened soul that looked through

those calm and steadfast eyes knew what fear was. It was rather a resolute acceptance of some trial that seemed to be drawing near, a looking earnestly towards that heaven from which some stroke of fate was imminent.

Friend Faith moved across the dim room in silence ; seated herself by the uncurtained window, whence the star-gemmed sky showed so gloriously, folded her hands, the one in the other, in her lap, and became as motionless as any statue.

“She is talking to the stars,” whispered Benjamin to Prue, with a face of great awe.

Then, as he saw a tear trickling down her cheek, he put up his hand to wipe it away.

“Is Our Lady dead ?” he said, shuddering. “Has the sorrow pierced her heart ? We will bury Our Lady of Sorrows under the daisies ; we will set roses on her breast.”

How strange is the power and the strength of the cords of human sympathy !

A few hours ago, and these two dear sisters had not known of this stranger’s existence, and now, while she waged the battle between life

and death, the one watched for her, the other wept.

It was a night never to be forgotten in the annals of Dromore.

Long after Benjamin lay sleeping the child-like sleep of the irresponsible, with Yap curled up at his feet, these two faithful souls kept vigil in the silence.

The stars glowed and paled ; the sky grew from purple to grey, and from grey to faintest rose ; the birds stirred and twittered in the branches ; a little breeze, the harbinger of the sun, rustled the leaves of the ivy and the sprays of jasmine that framed the windows ; and just as the edge of the ball of gold came up from the east, and sent a level ray right into the heart of the world, to awaken the sleepers and tell of the birth of a new day ; just as Prue had called to mind two lines that seem to gather up all the beauty and brightness of sunrise :

“ ’Tis the morning—
’Twas the night,”

Biddy came in all smiles and tears, like the

climate of her native land, and told the watchers that a little life was born into the world—that the stranger lady lay in the room above, white and wan, yet a loving, rejoicing mother, with her baby on her breast.

Thus, in strange and unpretending fashion, came into the heritage of life John Granger's son.

Such a little, little son !

A wee face like a doll's, with rings of silken hair above each temple ; a little life called into being before its time—called too soon into a world that is full of trial even to the strongest ; a frail and fragile idol for a woman to garner up her heart upon—a tiny baby with big eyes set in its little face ; eyes so darkly grey they shone like a mountain tarn with the sun on it—John's eyes ; the eyes that had won all a girl's heart in the old days that were past : the happy days before misunderstandings and cruel estrangements came about, turning what was once so sweet into bitterness. To Kate the sight of those baby-eyes was like meeting with one she had long parted from.

All through the long hours of that night of pain and unrest she had lain in a deep and at times unconscious stupor; but with the light of morning this cloud passed, and as the child was laid in her arms, and she saw John's eyes looking up at her from the sweet wee face, she caught it and held it, crying, as she fondled it with tears :

“ Oh, baby! baby! you have come to comfort me—to look at me with your father's eyes ! ”

Upon which the “ wise woman ” snatched the babe away, hushing it up to her ample breast, and covering the little head with her hand as though to shield it from some threatened ill.

“ And it's greetin' over a new-born child ye are,” she said ; “ would ye be afther bringing bad cess to it all the days of its life ? Hush, then, alanna ! 'twas no tears above ye, but just the dew o' the mornin' fallin' from the sky to bless ye ! ”

CHAPTER III.

“MATER DOLOROSA.”

MANY and varied were the rumours that floated round about Dromore concerning the “lodger” the ladies were now entertaining.

Once set agoing, hearsay blows as briskly as a wind from the sea ; and it is to be feared that Biddy had given her imagination wings to fly both high and far, so that the young mother and the little child became the centre of interest in every peasant home in Green Dales. Biddy hinted at this, and hinted at that, and the supposed rank of the lady rose from that of the wife of a “real gentleman entirely” to that of a prospective Prince. In the latter case public sympathy was inclined to centre upon the small—very small—baby that was constantly seen taking an airing in the somewhat tangled and out-at-elbows grounds of Dromore, and for

whose blood (so this same rumour said) the Sassenach cruelly thirsted. Nobody attempted to account for this remarkable conduct upon the part of the Sassenach, but everyone whispered to everyone else that it was cruel hard on the little one—"the cratur!" and might the Blessed Virgin herself watch over him, and then no manner of harm would befall him.

So much for the humbler inhabitants of Green Dales. The more pretentious hardly entertained such romantic ideas, but they were of the opinion that some mystery surrounded "Mrs Sinclair," and that Friend Faith and Friend Prue were discreet in their silence. They were taken by the stranger's grace and beauty, and caught by her trick of manner; by that intangible and irresistible charm of look and voice that so few could resist.

There was a quaintness verging upon the humorous in the way that Kate became fitted with that name—Mrs Sinclair. Friend Faith's reply to her when she christened herself with it was characteristic.

"Well, friend, we will call thee Mrs

Sinclair,” and Kate felt as though all her heart and life were laid bare before the calm, observant eyes of the speaker.

She pressed her hands one in the other, moving her head restlessly from side to side, as you may see an animal do when it wants to escape and knows the longing vain.

“I have had great trouble,” she said, haltingly, and speaking as though the truth were being drawn from her unwillingly, as by a mesmerist; “I made a good deal of the trouble for myself; I can see that now; but it was not any the less hard to bear—not any. I am going on a long voyage, to find the friend whom I missed at Dublin. She will not turn her back upon me; she will help me. All this must seem very strange to you; but bear with me.”

“Nay, there is no burden in thee to bear,” replied the other; “we love to look upon thee, and to have thee in our midst. If it were God’s will that thou shouldst rest here a while we should be glad at heart; and, for the little one, it is like sunshine to us. Our lives have

never held such a treasure before — it is a wonder to us, and Benjamin so loves it that he hath never wandered from us since it came.”

“Then I may stay a while,” said Kate, her natural impetuosity, restrained by Friend Faith’s calm reserve, kept under as by the steady pressure of a hand ; “oh, I long to stay ! Dromore seems like a new world—a world very far away from the world that—”

“Hush, my daughter !” said the elder woman. “I have asked thee not as to thy sorrow or thy desolation—‘the heart knoweth its own bitterness’—nor would I try to stir the deep waters ; rather would I counsel thee to lay bare thine heart to One who can best comfort thee and guide thee in the way whither thou shouldst go. I do entreat Him for thee daily, and will do so continually ; but do not—led on by a too impulsive heart—say to me that which peradventure in a time to come thou might wish unsaid. Rest here as thou wilt ; none shall molest thee, none shall question thee. Few are the echoes from the world beyond that reach Dromore, and thou mayest

find the quiet around thee healing. It may be that no long journey over seas is before thee; it may be the Lord's will, which shall presently be shown, that thou shouldst return upon the way that thou hast come. Nay, speak not, I pray thee. Thou art safe and cherished here—thee and thy babe. Hadst thou been poor thou shouldst have shared our poverty. Things being as they are, I have let thee join thy worldly goods to ours as much as I count to be just; therefore thou canst feel thyself no burden—nay verily, thou art a help to us, and a brightness in our midst; and I think the Lord hath greatly blessed thy presence among us, and our daily store hath much increased.”

A tear stole slowly down poor Kate's pale cheek as she listened, and yet it was passing sweet to her to know that she had been some help and comfort to those who had dealt lovingly and generously by her. She knew well that the same help, the same infinite charity, would have been extended to any shivering wretch who had chanced to fail and fall on the threshold of the old, mildewed, poverty-

stricken manor that was yet a home where that light of Divine love, which is in truth the light of the world, shone with still and clear refulgence. Yet she was not, for this reason, the less deeply grateful for the succour given to herself in her hour of sore need.

The simple courage with which the two dear sisters met the trials that had come upon them filled her with admiration. It was to her—reared in all the luxury that easy competence brings with it—a new experience, and one of her chief pleasures was to take delighted Biddy into her confidence, and procure some unlooked-for offering for the home that sheltered her. The carrier grew quite excited, and displayed much curiosity as to the size and number of the parcels that arrived at Dromore from the great city of Dublin; and Biddy reeled off to him such legends as to the mysterious stranger sojourning within their gates, that he might have been seen driving off in his great hooded van, with mouth puckered up in a perpetual whistle, while he scratched his head in a maze of vast perplexity.

Dainty garments for the tiny boy that was worshipped by the whole household—from Friend Faith, with her stately, tender interest in him, to Yap, who barked himself all sideways, till he looked like a dog in a high wind, every time he saw the long, slender bundle of white being carried out into the warm breezy sunshine—; a wonderful chair for Prue, so cunningly adjusted that it held you and clasped you like the arms of a friend; a book of pictured animals, such as the simple soul of Friend Benjamin had never dreamt of; a silver collar for Yap; and for Biddy a dress-length of the chastest green, over which the faithful creature said a whole rosary of prayers, and shed tears of agitated joy.

For Friend Faith—what?

Nothing as yet.

Kate had turned and turned over in her mind the problem of some possible offering for Faith Worthy, and found no solution ready.

It seemed something like sacrilege to think of offering her any mundane gift. The gifts

that rise from the heart like sweet-smelling incense seemed more appropriate—love, reverence, gratitude, of these Kate gave no stint. The sleeping-chamber given up to her so naturally from the first; the gentle service of daily ministrations; the ever-watchful care over mother and child: how could such things be repaid, save by that homage of the spirit that is at once intangible, yet precious?

Kate had quickly become conscious that she was dwelling with one whose soul was steeped in that deep, indwelling light that sees in all things—sorrows and trials, as well as blessings and joys—the infinite love of God.

The marvellous majestic silence of the Quaker worship; the ceaseless, patient waiting upon God; the willing following, absolutely blindfold, along the path of life, over the thorns and even the red-hot ploughshares that might lie in the way, simply because it was His hand that led, His voice that called to follow on—all this grew upon her, smiting her with a sense of wrong and shame on her own part; smiting her as the blessed palms of the

righteous smite, in love as well as warning. She saw no knee bent, no head bowed, no book opened, yet she lived in a world of prayer and close communion with God that she felt, as we feel the atmosphere that surrounds us.

Outwardly Kate's life at this strange period of her experiences was calm, quiet, useful to those about her. She often took her turn at the “table”; customers coming thick and fast. She herself purchased the little pink-edged hood we wot of, and forthwith “baby”—there being, of course, no other baby in the world, that title sufficed—appeared in it as he took his walks abroad, and Benjamin's shrill, cackling laughter greeted the procession, you may be sure.

Never had Benjamin been so happy as since our Lady of Sorrows came straight from heaven to take up her abode at Dromore. His simple faith in the supernatural character of her appearance among them was touching to witness. He would gather the prettiest blossoms from the tangle of greenery that

called itself a garden, and scatter them before her as she walked. He would bind the roses into posies, and set them one on either side of her place at table, singing to himself—in a faint shrill treble, like no other voice, yet tuneful too—the pretty swinging litanies that he had heard in the little chapel by the sea, and whose melody his ear had caught and held. Week after week passed away, and there was no sign of those restless, roaming spells of his that made Faith's cheek grow white, and Prue's eyes full of restless fear. Not, be it understood, that the sisters ever spoke of those times of trial to Mrs Sinclair ; indeed, it touched her to the heart to note how tender they were over this brother of theirs, how they treated him exactly as though he were just like the rest of the world, yet what covert watch they kept upon him, restless if he were too long absent, happy if he seemed content and quiet. He knew no weariness in watching Kate and the child. He would take his stand at the foot of the wide uncarpeted stairs of a morning, and so wait her coming, looking

up at her with his great wide eyes, and calling to his sisters, waiting in the sunlit parlour where the kettle hissed on the hob :

“ She is coming—our Lady is coming ! ”

Kate, looking down and seeing the child-face between the lint-white locks that fell on either side, the little dog with its paws on the lowermost step, and its tail all in a flutter, felt their simple love to be a very precious offering. She was schooling herself to try and live in the present and turn her eyes away resolutely from the past. All her mental attitude seemed to have become one of waiting. She could not have told you what she was waiting for. If you had said that, unconsciously to herself, she was waiting and listening for some voice—whose voice ? — to call from out the world she had deserted, “ Come back ! Come back ! I cannot live without you ! ” she would have cast aside the idea with scorn.

Nay, she could not be so weak.

Had she not cast them all aside of her own free will, and elected to brave the world—a new world in which no one could reproach

her for having married a man to his own undoing; in which there would be no Aunt Libbie to stab her with pin-pricks day by day, and hour by hour—and make herself a habitation and a name by her own unaided exertions? Had she resolved thus, thus acted, wrenching herself away from what was dearer than life itself—from the touch of a man's hand that thrilled her through and through, from the sound of a man's voice that filled her ears with music—a music that must be for ever silent until she heard that tender, precious voice again? Had she gone through this Gehenna, and was she now to faint and fail—to draw back—to stultify her former resolutions?

True, at times her thoughts rushed with impassioned flight towards the husband she had deserted. Never, in her saddest moments of rebellion against the troubles that had gathered and surged about her, had Kate for one moment failed to recognise the cruel truth—that with John all romance, all passion, all intensity of devotion must pass from her life.

Had she loved him less, she ne'er had left him. The horror of the thought that his love for her might fade, because of all the conflicting influences that had come into his life with her, had been one of the whips to scourge her into the erring course she had followed. Better he should mourn her as lost—as dead; better he should look back and think of her sitting at his knee with the rose at her throat, and her cheek against his hand; better he should remember her thus, and call to mind the passionate cry: “Sweetheart — oh my sweetheart!” than come to realise more and more the estrangements and difficulties that had arisen from their marriage, and thus cease to love her with the passion and the tenderness that alone could satisfy her.

Yet doubts of herself were not wanting. They would often intrude their ugly faces, after the manner of their kind, when they were least wanted.

She had been miserable, tortured, misconstrued, intolerant of the suffering that came upon her daily, and she had fled from the

babel of it all, stopping the ears of her mind lest she should hear a pleading voice calling to her through the distance. Every line of the letter she had written to John seemed as though traced for ever on her brain in letters of fire.

“ When you read this I shall have passed out of your life. They tell me I should never by rights have been a part of it, and that you, my husband, feel this to be so. You are dearer to me now this moment than ever before ; always believe this ; let no one—no one—ever make you think otherwise. Do not be afraid for me ; I am not afraid for myself. I shall not be quite lonely, for I shall have our child. Perhaps God will be merciful to me, and it will have your eyes—your dear, dear eyes that I have seen watching me so often. There is much more that I wanted to say, but I cannot remember—only this : if you hear the poor woman we have listened to so often, singing out in the night, and if she sings, ‘ Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye,’ fancy,

dear love of mine, that it is Kate's voice singing to you, Kate's love calling to you."

That was all.

How often since had she thought how much, much more there might have been? Lying wide-eyed through the night, her baby breathing soft and low beside her, its little velvet hand within her breast, Kate would watch and weep, even until the pale finger of dawn traced the pattern of the window in the wall, and a new day—a day silent for lack of a loved voice, barren for lack of the craved - for touch of hand and lip—was born.

In these long nights of watching what self-questionings would arise?

What of the overmastering impulse that had hurried her on, driven her forth into the wide, wide world, away, away from the surroundings that pressed her so hard, that stifled her, that had grown intolerable? Whence came that rush and passion of rebellion?

What was the influence that urged her on

to take her life into her hands once more, and shape it better to her liking?

Was it not an impulse—masquerade as it might under other name—born of self?

Let her tear “the face-cloth from its face;” let her stare close into its wide-distended eyes, and hard-compressed lips.

Was it not the old undisciplined spirit that the voice of the faithful dead had warned her against so often?

Was it not a failure—a dismal, gruesome failure—rather than an heroic or self-sacrificing action?

How John must have suffered! Doubtless by this time Aunt Cynthia would be in England. Poor Aunt Cynthia! it would take them hours and hours to explain to her that it was even possible a wife should leave her husband.

Then, Will—how the bright face would be overcast, the bonnie blue eyes all dimmed with tears!

And far away, up in the stern north, a mother would mourn her son’s deserted home—his desolate hearth.

Ah me! that was the hardest thought of all the sweet pale face upon the pillow, and Humbie: Humbie would be sure to be near at such a time of wonderment and pain—Humbie bending over her. All the homestead would be hushed and still. There would be “no sound of violins”; the twins would be linked arm-in-arm; they would go softly, whisper fearfully. Jack would look in the faces of his friends wistfully, and as though he longed for the gift of speech. The girls would go down to the gate with James Dodd, and the three would speak low the one to the other.

And the old motto would show dark in the moonlight: “God’s Providence is My Inheritance.”

There is no limit to that claim upon the great Father. “My” stands for the whole wide world: for every soul, white or black, soiled or pure, sinful or saintly, in it.

No hand can be stretched forth in vain; but, being stretched forth and clasped, then must the guidance of the Father be followed.

Had not Kate rather wrenched her hand away from the Divine hold, and staggered out into the darkness—she knew not whither?

After one of these long nights of weary thought and vigil, during which Kate shed tears enough over her babe to bring bad luck indeed to it all the days of its life, if what the wise woman said was true, the morning ushered in one of the most golden days that summer ever gave the world. Summer was now in the prime of her prime, and it seemed as though the birds were silent, not so much because the time of singing was past, as because they were awed into stillness by the perfection of the beauty that surrounded them.

Roses ran riot everywhere in that sweet, neglected garden—roses white and roses red, roses that were each a golden chalice with a glowing amber heart the colour of a sunset sky; roses that swung in the gentle, balmy air, happy acrobats on leaf-wreathed, slender boughs; roses that grew in natural posies, with pink-tipped up-folded little buds for a centre-piece; cabbage-roses, old-fashioned,

pink-faced, round like a dairy-maid's, and giving forth such sweet breath that the very bees gathering their store of honey seemed to linger on their way.

The poverty and decay that had left such cruel traces about the old house showed less in the ripe, rich summer-time than in autumn or winter. The very luxuriance born of neglect gave an idea of a plenty that, as it were, bubbled over, and ran riot in leaf and flower. The confused tangle of briar and brushwood, weed and flower, had a beauty of its own, for even the very weeds grew bold and thrust up blossoms into the sunshine, showing themselves off cheek by jowl with the blue spires of the lupin, and the Canterbury bells.

Kate, sitting out on the seat beneath the shadow of the cedar, watching Miss Prue arranging the pretty woollen wares in as tempting a manner as possible, was struck anew by the wild, unfettered beauty around her. The scented air buffeted her face, the sunshine from above filtered through the boughs and made a dainty tessellated pave-

ment of green and gold at her feet; roses nodded so near her hand they seemed begging to be gathered and set in her breast.

Friend Faith came out from under the crazy porch, a quaintly pleasing figure in her drab robe and dazzlingly white shawl, with the Quaker cap clipping round the quiet serenity of her face.

A silent woman, save on rare occasions of much-stirred feeling, she laid her hand on Kate's shoulder by way of greeting, letting her gentle eyes wander round the sunshine-bathed garden, with its gay, sweet store of flowers, and its many-tinted greenery.

Kate followed, and answered the look that said so much more than many words from another.

"It is one of God's own days," she said, her changed and saddened face lit up by a happy smile; "one of God's own days!"

The answer came, quietly enough uttered, yet each word as incisive as if cut with a knife.

"All the days are God's days, my daughter,

the cloudy ones as well as the bright ones, just as all our times are in His hand; the time of sorrow no less than the time of joy and gladness.”

It seemed as though some sudden pain, that yet brought with it light and healing, struck right to Kate’s heart.

Yes, she had forgotten that the sad days were God’s gift as well as the glad ones. She had forgotten that, and in her haste and madness had thrust them from her, and so fled.

Friend Benjamin, sent to bid her come to breakfast, surprised a tear upon her cheek.

“ You are always sad,” he said, “ Our Lady of Sorrows.”

“ Yes,” she cried, with a little strangled sob, “ that name suits me best of all, dear Friend!”

CHAPTER IV.

“ IS IT THE DAWN BREAKING ? ”

THE coming of Mrs Sinclair into the midst of the Dromore home circle was to Friend Benjamin a truly stupendous event. It took so much thinking over that the simple creature never knew a weary or unoccupied hour, and was for ever talking to Yap upon the subject, the little dog listening as though he fully entered into and understood every word.

The coming of the babe was a wonder too, a sort of miracle, and really necessitated the gravest consideration.

“ You and I must be very careful,” said Friend Benjamin to Yap, who, with one ear up and one down, listened intently—“ quite a different man, and quite a different dog. It would never do for me to roam the woods all night talking to the stars when they peep

through the green, because I might be wanted, and must always be at hand, and as the little kid grows older he'll want a store of paper animals to amuse him, you know ; so idleness cannot be allowed. As for you, no rushing about after starlings or barking at the milkman must be even thought of. You must become a graver and wiser dog than you have ever been yet, and we must both learn to go about softly—softly—softly, so that a leaf will not rustle, for to wake a child suddenly will give the demons power over it. Biddy says so, and she knows. But if you see a butterfly fluttering near our Lady and the child you may chase it away, for butterflies are the souls of the departed, and may work harm to the living. Once a butterfly came in through the open window when the baby was asleep, and Biddy was afraid, and crossed herself—once—twice—thrice, and the soul flew away. Yap, I wonder where they fly to ? It looks too high to the blue sky that is above us.”

Seeing his master look up, Yap looked up, too, and, fondly imagining his attention was

being directed to some possible prey, growled in his little stomach, and stamped upon the grass.

Friend Benjamin took no heed, for a lark had risen from the sod, and was rising, rising, rising, borne upwards, or so it seemed, by the rush and ecstasy of its own song.

“That little bird must be a holy soul, and has flown straight to heaven,” said the poor “natural.” “See, it has passed the white cloud, where the angels sit and sing. Yap, Yap! you would not bark at a holy soul!”

For Yap, showing but little of the spirit of reverence, it must be confessed, had given a sharp yelp, and had to have his nose smothered against the breast of his master’s coat.

Another of Benjamin’s fancies at this time resulted in a quaint enough interview between himself and the round-faced priest of the little church of Our Lady.

That worthy man was contemplating, with no small satisfaction, a brand-new Virgin and Child of startlingly florid colouring lately presented by some pious soul to a side altar. His

fat hand gently patted his own folded arm, as a sort of reverent applause and mark of satisfaction. He stood with his head on one side, and a rather fatuous smile upon his smooth-shaven face. Himself one of the people, he had all the love of bright colours so characteristic of the Irish peasantry, and the statue, with its crimson robe, crown of yellow stars, and babe all dressed in blue, pleased him well.

So absorbed was he in the glory of this new addition to the completeness of his chapel, he heard not a pattering step along the aisle, and gave quite a jump when a high-pitched voice said close to his ear :

“ We have a better one than that at home. Ours moves and speaks, and the baby is twice as beautiful—oh, many, many times as beautiful ! I think there never was so sweet a child. When he is asleep he smiles, and then we know the angels are whispering to him. He can hear them, though we cannot see them ; but Biddy thinks she heard the rustling of wings the other night.”

“ Biddy is a good girl—a good girl,” said

the Father, smiling upon Benjamin's earnest child-face. "She never misses mass nor benediction, nor fails in her duty. The saints watch over her!"

"Our Lady of Sorrows loves Biddy," said Benjamin simply.

The Father crossed himself hurriedly.

"Our Lady of Sorrows!—Friend—what strange talk is this?"

"That is her name," replied the other, with quiet confidence in his own conviction; "I found her asleep among the daisies. She is always sad; there is a tear on her cheek, and a sigh in her breast. Her sorrows have pierced her through and through. 'That is my name,' she said to me—'that is the name I love best of all; Mater—Mater Dolorosa.'"

Then some disjointed remembrance of what he had seen and heard in the many chapels he had wandered into in his time came over Friend Benjamin. He folded his hands and bowed his head:

"Ora pro me! Ora pro me!"

This gentle creature being from his affliction

in a state of “ invincible ignorance,” the good Father felt it no sin to mutter a blessing over the white bent head.

He bethought him, too, being a kindly soul, as he took his way homeward through the gloaming, of the strange words that had fallen from the natural’s lips.

Was there not in very truth some sorrow-laden soul close at hand, some stricken woman seeking sanctuary with the good ladies of Dromore ?

Might not the cry, “ *Ora pro me* ” rise from that troubled heart, in passionate entreaty, finding voice, as it were, through the unconscious utterance of the idiot ?

Doubtless the woman who had ever “ a tear on her cheek and a sigh in her breast ” was a heretic, and it was difficult to pray for a heretic unless for the conversion of the same ; but the kindly old man struck a sort of bargain with his conscience, and prayed earnestly that night for all who were weary and heavy-laden, all who were desolate and oppressed.

This man’s heart, like that of many a man

and woman of the same communion I have known, and loved, was wider than his creed, nor could the narrow bonds of bigotry prevent the overflow of the pent-up tenderness of his nature, nor yet the stunted life he led deaden or wither sympathies naturally warm and true.

Be sure Kate was no worse for the good Father's prayer. We are all far the better for such hidden sympathy, and may oftentimes feel the warmth and comfort gathering about our hearts, though we know not whence it comes ; we may be strengthened and refreshed in our hour of need in answer to the prayer we know not of. And truly Kate stood sorely in need of help, of comfort, of sustaining power.

At times a gentle light played across her pathway. Her love for her child was a passion — an absorbing, consuming passion of tenderness that had in it much of the element of pain. He was such a fragile thing — so white, so tiny, so unlike all other children !

“Sure an’ if he’d croy a bit the more it would be the betther for all parties,” Biddy would say. “An’ it’s loikin’ I’d be to see him

kick out as he walks up my apron after washin’.”

He was the quietest of babies, this wee thing with John’s dark grey eyes and long dark lashes, and he would start and quiver like an aspen leaf if a door opened sharply, or Biddy clapped her hands.

“ Sure an’ it’s afther havin’ the tongue cut out of ye ye’ll be, Yap, if ye make the darlint skip out of his blessed skin that way wid your noises,” would Biddy say, as the little dog jumped and barked with joy when she appeared in the grass-grown pathway with her precious burden ; and Yap must have understood, for he would put a check upon himself instantly, and walked by her side as demure as a mediæval saint of a dog, fit to be canonised, and put in a stained glass window alongside the immortal Jim Crow.

Like the gentle Mother of old, Kate noted many things, and kept and pondered them in her heart.

Had not her own undisciplined rebellion of spirit, her own discontented girdings against

the lines in which she found herself entangled, her sighing and her tears in the night season—had not all these been visited upon the head of this innocent, helpless babe? Was he not born into this world with nerves too highly strung, with delicate shrinking frame, with features white and wan, old before their time? Could she ever look at him without self-reproach? Could she ever forget that her own cowardice, her own pitiful shrinking from trial, had made him what he was: a little atom born under a stranger's roof—born far away from the shelter of a father's arms—that father (ah me, how dearly loved, though so defrauded!) cheated of a father's joy—left in his home all desolate, wifeless and childless! Ah, let her not think of it, lest madness seize her brain, and in the bosom of the sea that moaned and sobbed beneath the moon she and her child be driven to seek the rest of death! “What so easy as return?” a voice would seem to whisper at her ear, but strangely enough she shrank from the thought with an agony of repulsion

Most strong natures have a vein of stubborn obstinacy running through them ; and to this rule Kate—poor misguided Kate—was no exception. If some appeal could reach her in her quiet nest—if some urgent cry should reach her from the far away—but not else, not else.

She had fled of her own free will ; she had doomed herself to spiritual starvation (for what was life else, without the man she loved for ever by her side?), and she would not, having entered into the battle, turn back, and cry : “ I am vanquished. My will is but a plaything, and has failed me. It hangs limp like a broken rope ; it will not bear me up.”

She had thought it best for John as well as for herself that she should fade away out of his life as though she had never been. She was of a mind to think so still ; but, with the love of the child that was his as well as hers, there had come upon her a deeper tenderness towards her husband, a truer appreciation of what his suffering must have been in losing her.

At times she felt afraid of herself, and by way of putting a barrier between that feeble self and the old life she had cast off she wrote to the friend she had missed just by one fateful day at Dublin, and who was now over seas in beautiful Boston city. This lady had once been her governess, always her friend, always in truth her slave and worshipper.

“She will ask no questions,” thought Kate, “she will take me as I am, she will adore baby. Together she and I will work to live, and live to work. By now she knows that I was coming to her, and came just too late. She will never betray me. The moment the thought of her came to me in those dreadful days, I knew I had a sure refuge ready. The mistake as to time was her fault; she sailed a week sooner than she had told me. She must have passed out of Queenstown Harbour when I was still——”

But here her thoughts glanced aside, as one might shrink away from the touch of a hand upon a wound. It would never do to let

herself think of John and that last night—never! The dear face seen in the disc of the lamplight; the eyes—those load-stars of her life—watching her as she moved step by step further and further from him. . . .

Such a vision, if dwelt upon, might drive her to God only knew what folly.

Friend Faith's all-observant eyes caught sight of the American letter.

“Thou wilt not leave us yet awhile,” she said. “Baby is not fit to cross the sea; he must grow somewhat bigger first, and, I fain would hope, stronger.”

Kate caught her breath.

“He is very small, I know,” she said; “but Biddy says he is healthy—*very* healthy.”

“Biddy has kissed the Blarney-stone, thee knows,” replied Friend Faith with a smile.

“But he will be strong,” said poor Kate, with a sickening flutter at her heart; “it is only a matter of time?”

“And God's will,” said the other. “Thee must not make an idol of thy little one. I well-nigh lost my Prue because I sinned

against the Lord in that. It was only when I won the victory over my own heart, and cried to Him, ‘Do what Thou wilt with Thine own ; she is not mine, but Thine ; I lay her in the hollow of Thy hand, do with her what Thou wilt,’ that He had compassion on me, and gave her back to me. Friend—it was a sore chastening, but much blessed to me ; yet would I spare thee such pain at the hands of Him who wills not that we cling too closely to aught beside Himself.”

“I wish I had your faith, your love, your patience,” cried Kate, impulsive still ; “it must be beautiful to live so near to God at all times. If it had been so with me, I should never have—failed—as—miserably—as—I—have—done—”

The words were cut in two by little panting sobs. Kate was on her knees by Faith Worthy, with her face hidden on the lap of the drab gown.

There was not a stir or tremble in the quiet face above her, only a firm and gentle hand touched the bowed head.

“ It is just in failure that He comes nearest to us, my daughter. It was after the long toil and darkness of the night, when the disciples were weary with a fruitless, hopeless task—it was then that, in the first grey dawn of the morning, the Master stood upon the shore. It may be so with thee, my child, even now. I know not, nor can know ; but the dawn may be breaking over the sea of trouble ; the Master’s footsteps may be heard in the time of darkness and waiting.”

CHAPTER V.

MELISSA “DOESN’T CARE.”

“IT was a thing that a man could never forget—never. It is like a nightmare to me to look back upon ; it always will be.”

So absorbed and excited was William Dennis Pierrepont by the picture which his own words called up, that he became somewhat oblivious of the social conveniences, and took to walking up and down the Low Cross Rectory drawing-room, every now and again running his fingers through the ripples of his hair, and making them stand on end.

Melissa, swaying herself in an American swing chair that looked like a magnified grasshopper, was not sleepy now. On the contrary, she was alert from head to foot, a sprightly, graceful figure, with her hands clasped behind her head, and the long bows and ends of

ribbon on her elbow sleeves fluttering like wing-feathers as she swayed.

"I should think it must have been dreadful—dreadful!" she said, excitement pulsing within her veins, and giving her a touch of damask rose on either cheek; "oh, Mr Pierrepont, how could you bear to see it?"

"Just because I had to, you know," replied Will to this somewhat illogical question; "but even now there are nights when I dream about it. Oh yes, I do, and start up and fancy I hear that frenzied knocking, see that white, appealing face, hear that hoarse cry: 'My wife, my wife—she has left me! She has gone I know not whither! Come down and let me in! Quick, quick! We may think of some plan together!' Alas! Miss Sweetapple, that night, and many a day and many a night to follow, we have thought of this plan and that, taken this step or the other, but to what purpose? Has not John Granger spread a network of inquiry everywhere? Why, he must have spent a fortune over it; and yet, what has it all brought us in

return? One solitary relic of that dearest, sweetest girl—the little kerchief found at the turn of the road, the rose leaves in the hall and on the stairs—no more, no more. And oh! to watch his breaking heart; to watch the cruel work of sorrow day by day; to see the courage and resolution of the man whom I have often thought so weak. Yes, God forgive me, I have thought him that. Miss Sweetapple, you have been my only comfort; I have kept nothing back from you; have laid my heart bare before you; have taken comfort in your sympathy, as I am sure, quite sure, she—our dear lost one—meant me to do.”

“Don’t say that!” cried Melissa, suddenly sitting up straight, as if she had a spring in the middle of her body; “don’t say *lost*; I cannot bear it. I shall cry, I know I shall, if you say it again; and you know, Mr Pierrepont, you won’t like to see me cry. Women don’t look at all nice when they cry; their noses get red, and their eyes like ferrets.”

“If your nose was blue, Miss Sweetapple” (this with great earnestness), “it would not in

the very slightest degree affect my estimation of you—my admiration for you” . . .

“Hush!” said Melissa, bringing her little high heels together with a clink like a Prussian cavalry officer; “let us speak of her—of Mrs John—of B—b—b—bonnie Kate.”

“Miss Sweetapple,” cried Will, standing right in front of her, with his arms folded, and his rumpled hair like the serpents of the Medusa, “you are crying now. I wish it wasn’t such a foolish thing for a man to cry—I wish he didn’t always look such a sickening ass when he does, you know. I’ve often thought since all this wretched business came about, it would do me good to have a real good cry—I have indeed. When I think of what she said that day on the river—when I think how she said it—‘When you see Melissa’—I really beg your pardon, you know, Miss Sweetapple, but she said it like that, you know—and it’s Kate that’s speaking now, not me. Do you see?”

“Perfectly,” said Melissa, with a deliciously dignified bend of the head.

“ Ah well, that’s all right,” said Will, with a relieved air. “ Then, as I was saying, she said : ‘ When you see Melissa——’ Miss Sweetapple, how did you come to have such an uncommon name, such a very remarkable——”

“ We were speaking of Mrs John and what she said to you, were we not ? ”

The sleek head was held so remarkably high, the bright eyes were so persistently cast down, that Will promptly harked back ; in other words, took up his parable at the proper place.

“ Yes, of course we were ; quite so. Well, she said : ‘ When you see Melissa, tell her I shall never forget her goodness to me.’ You see, my cousin Kate—very clever girl, always was,—knew intuitively that when the sorrow of her loss should come upon us, we—that is, I—should naturally make my way to you sooner or later—as I have. When first Lady Whimperdale said to me in town, ‘ Come to us at Steadly, Mr Pierrepont ; you will like to see the places where your dear cousin——’ ”

"Mr Pierrepont," said Melissa, putting out her hand towards him, as though to stop him ; "don't speak in that dreadful kind of way. If you do I know that we shall *both* cry. Don't speak as if your Cousin Kate were dead. I tell you I can't bear it. Do you know that someone once said to Humbie that she must be *that*, and he rushed away into the woods, and never came home all night?"

"But, Miss Sweetapple, do you know that John has made up his mind, and Aunt Cynthia, and—and that dreadful Miss Libbie, and the police——"

"I don't care that for the police!" cried Melissa, springing to her feet, and snapping her fingers in the face of an imaginary constable ; "I don't care that for anybody ! I tell you she's not—she's not—*she's not* !"

"Miss Sweetapple," said Will, when this ebullition was over, and Melissa, having defied the constabulary of the land as one man, lay back somewhat exhausted and breathless in her chair, "I wish that I could share your conviction. I am bound to confess that it is

so strong—such a real and living thing—that, like the strong breath that blows the dying ember, it almost rekindles hope in my heart, and yet I have come to be thankful that John Granger——”

“Believes his wife to be dead?”

“Yes, I think nothing else saved him from what is worse than death itself.”

“From madness?”

“Yes, that was what I feared. When he was with me that night I saw the latent madness in his restless eyes; I noted the sharp shudder that shook his frame every now and again, the sudden, helpless action of his hands as if he were pushing something away from him. Others noticed these things too. The detective whom he first employed touched his own forehead significantly, and then said: ‘A bad case—a bad case, sir; and like to grow worse still.’ I am sure John never slept at that time—indeed, that poor, trembling, unnerved creature that was once Aunt Libbie—told me that she used to hear him pacing, pacing up and down, up and down, mutter-

ing to himself, all through the long hours of the night. Fancy her, Miss Sweetapple, on her knees outside his closed door, shivering, shaking, afraid to sob lest he should hear her, and order her away. She, whose fault it was, so broken down, so changed, only longing for him to turn on her and rend her, as it were; and he, going about as though he were unconscious of her existence,—of anyone's—almost of his own. The awful silence of that house is a thing never to be forgotten. It is a tangible thing—a creeping horror; the servants speaking in whispers to each other, crouching in corners if they saw the master coming; the flowers dead and drooping in the pretty drawing-room—the flowers she loved; and at home, in the old home by the river, Mrs Dulcimer, the old house-keeper of whom I told you, hovering about Aunt Cynthia—poor old Dulce looking years and years older all in a month or two, her face so lined, her hair so white; and Chloe—— Oh, Miss Sweetapple, what strange creatures dogs are! We never heard Chloe keen like a little ban-

shee before. Dulce said it was a 'sign.' Then Aunt Cynthia—— No, I can't speak of *her*, even to you, not yet. Uncle Anthony, before he died, told me to take care of her, to shield her from trouble. I have not been able to carry out his behest, have I?"

"I can see it all," said Melissa, "just as you have told it me. The garden sloping to the river, the belt of trees, the shine of the water beyond, and the boat, the Daffodil, bobbing up and down among the kingcups, even little Chloe—yes, I can see it all in my mind's eye—in my mind's eye."

"I hope—I trust—I should be very sorry to think you would not——"

"What, Mr. Pierrepont?" This with some amaze.

"See it all with your natural eyes, some day," said Will, as bold as brass.

Silence, broken only by the gentle swing of the chair on its mighty rockers.

Then Melissa set off on her own account:

"Does not Mr John resent Miss Libbie's dreadful behaviour any more?"

"I do not think he resents anything; he does not seem to have it left in him. He will insist upon attending to his business engagements, and, I am told, conducted a defence wonderfully well the other day. But he is leading two lives; one active, in his business hours; the other a dreadful, ghastly, torpid existence that has little or nothing of life in it. No one but himself knows exactly what part Miss Libbie has played; no one dare ask him; no one can; it seems strange she should go on staying with him; stranger still to me that she should have got a sort of hold over my Aunt Cynthia, who is full of pity for her, and when I spoke of having her forcibly taken away from Kensington and packed off to the farm, would not back me up a bit. 'Let her stay,' she said; 'she does no harm; she will kill herself if you make her leave him. He takes no notice of her, nor of anyone. I hardly think he knew me when I went. She is more to be pitied than anyone, because she has been wicked; but now her heart is broken, and old hearts do not mend.' I knew she was speak-

ing of herself as well then, and my own heart felt twenty times too big for my body ; it did, indeed."

"And you believe," said Melissa, after a long silence, during which neither looked at the other, and Melissa swung slowly, like a tired pendulum—"you do really think it has been better—no, less hard, let us say, for Mr John since he believed his sweet wife dead?"

"Well, yes, if you can use the expression 'better' to his state at all. You knew—did you not?—that the detectives traced someone who appeared to answer to the description of my cousin to a place far down the river, and then lost all scent? I shall never forget the man telling me of the numbers who disappear into that dark river and are never heard of more. The man himself looked as though all the secrets of life and death were known to him—so quiet, so subtle, with such a stealthy, tiger-like step, and such a crafty, all-seeing look about his small furtive eyes. 'It's a pity someone doesn't tell the poor

gentleman that it's no manner of use going on and on searching after a dead woman, that it is, sir,' he said to me, speaking in a low, even voice that made my flesh creep. 'Why, if she were alive, she couldn't have escaped us. We'd men out here, and men out there; the force isn't to be trifled with that way; people daren't do it, sir. Something's been on the poor lady's mind, and drove her to it. 'Meaning the river?' I said, a chill shudder coursing through my veins; 'meanin' the river, sir,' he answered. 'There's a deal of 'em goes that way; some through drink, some through bitter sorrow—a deal of 'em, sir, as the world never hears a word on. This case has been kep' mighty quiet, but it's bin watched well—watchèd well, and no mistake, money bein' spent, as you may say, promisc'us-like. But you've got to make allowance for the currents, sir, and the way they set out to sea; they're stronger than twenty men's hands a-pulling low down under the water, and they twist and turn a body round and round like a heddy making game wi' a straw.' He

was a dreadful man, Miss Sweetapple ; his lips were always working, even when he was not speaking, as though he were chewing the cud of all the dreadful things he knew. Well, the next time I met John Granger after that interview I felt as guilty—ay, as guilty as if I had had some hand in the losing of his Bonnie Kate.”

Will was pacing up and down the room again, Melissa watching him, the swing chair at rest, her lithe hands clutching the arms of it tight.

“I don’t care for the horrid man, with his bodies and his currents, and his bogie tales—I don’t care a fig! If he had said it all to me I would have snapped my fingers in his face—so! and said to him, as I now say to you, ‘She isn’t—she isn’t! I don’t believe it! I won’t believe it! I sha’n’t believe it!—there!’ Did her letter to her husband look as if she meant to be dead? Did she look like a person who is likely to be dead—of her own accord, I mean? She was in desperate trouble about—we know what, and then Miss

Libbie made matters worse. Oh, she's a dreadful creature is Miss Libbie! I know she's very sorry, and all that, now; but she's a dreadful creature. Why, even the pony knew it, and used to shy every time he met her."

Then Melissa bent forward in her chair, and looked very gravely into Will's face.

"Mr Pierrepont," she said, "do you know what Farmer Granger said when he heard that Mr John's wife had left him? He said—pardon me for using the word — '*Dang Libbie!*' He brought his fist down on the round oak table till all the plates and pans danced like a boiling coffee-pot. The girls ran away and hid themselves. James Dodd, the young man from the ironstone works, was there, and he jumped clean out of window. Then the farmer got up, and rushed like mad into the orchard. He looked like a man who had something in his throat that was choking him; he was purple in the face; and when he got as far as the big apple-tree, he stamped on the grass, and out with it. Do you know what it was? Why — again pardon

me for using the expression—‘Dang Libbie! Ebenezer heard him, and thought he was shouting at the crows. He said it just that way: ‘Dang Libbie!’ Mr Pierrepont, if I were a man, I would say, ‘Dang Libbie!’ too.”

With a rustle, not exactly as of angels’ wings, but as of a black silk dress and a wide-sleeved dolman of magnificent proportions, Mrs Sweetapple was in their midst.

She smiled with exceeding sweetness upon Will; frowned upon the piquant figure in the swinging-chair.

“Melissa!”

“Yes, ma.”

“What language is that I hear?”

“Farmer Granger’s, ma; he’s a bad, bold man to say such things, isn’t he?”

“You are a bad, bold girl to repeat such things. I confess I am quite at a loss to imagine what Mr Pierrepont can possibly think of you, mixing as he does in the——”

“Highest aristocratic circles,” put in Melissa, with her eyes cast down. “Lord Whimper-

dale and that lot. Well, let's hope he won't tell them, that's all, ma."

"As to what I think of Miss Sweetapple," began Will, hotly; but a warning eye—there was only room for one to show round the angle of Mrs Sweetapple's dolman sleeve—ordered him to desist.

He looked very much as though he were going to choke, but obeyed the unspoken hint, and just at that moment the good Rector came doddering in from his den.

Melissa had him round the neck in a moment.

"Pa, wouldn't you say—of course I mean if you were a layman, and of course I mean if you were Farmer Granger—wouldn't you say, '*Dang Libbie*'?"

"Well, my dear," said the Rector, with a gentle, sly smile, "if I were a layman, and if I were Farmer Granger, I think, taking into consideration the part that ill-judged woman has apparently played in late events, it is possible I might relieve my feelings by such an expression, or one equivalent to it."

“Now, Mr Pierrepont,” said Melissa, “if you tell tales of me to the highest aristocratic circles, please tell that too—say that, irreclaimable as I am, I have the sanction of the Church.”

The Rector peered near-sightedly round the room.

“Is he gone?” he said confidentially to Melissa.

“If you mean the ‘Rev. Budd,’ as cooky calls him, he hasn’t been yet. It’s a pleasure to come.”

“Last time he was here, he was a thought wearisome,” said the Rector, rubbing his hands slowly together, and evidently taking himself to task for being on inhospitable thoughts intent; “he will be much pleasanter when he has finished improving his parish and all the people in it; in the transition stage most things are apt to be trying; so, when I heard the bell, I ventured to turn the key in my study door.”

“Sermon, pa,” said Melissa, with an absurd assumption of gravity. “Mustn’t be dis-

turbed ; mundane matters must be rigorously excluded. It's one of the advantages of being a clergyman that you can always say you are writing a sermon if you don't want to show."

"My dear, my dear!" said the Rector, trying to look a stern reproof, but his old eyes twinkling in spite of him in the midst of their network of wrinkles ; "if I had known it was Mr Pierrepont——"

"Mr Sweetapple, you are always good to me," put in Will heartily. "You always make me welcome, and really I do feel that the way in which I have run in and out of this house ever since I have been at Steadly—I, a stranger, as one might say——"

"Nay, nay," said the old man quickly, "no one may say that ; no one belonging to John Granger can be a stranger here. John was my very dear pupil ; he was indeed my pride. God be with him and near him in this the day of his bitter sorrow."

For the moment the homely room felt as sacred a place as any church could be ; for on

each lip and in each heart was the word "Amen," though no sound was audible.

It may have been expected by the reader that Mrs Sweetapple would be spiteful and nasty over the disappearance of young Mrs Granger. If so, the reader will be grievously disappointed.

People who are very ill-natured, and even venomous, over small social and personal matters will often drop all contentiousness of spirit when a real deep sorrow comes. I think it is one of the beautiful uses of sorrow and of trial that this should be so. Trouble welds us all together as the mortar welds the bricks, and so a fair and solid edifice of sympathy and friendship is often raised upon a site where only confusion and barrenness reigned erstwhile.

Mrs Sweetapple was wont to observe that "you might have knocked her down with a feather"—when she was told of young Mrs Granger's disappearance.

All the embers of romance in her heart had not yet smouldered out. She remembered the

early days of her married life at Low Cross Vicarage; the shapely form, the curly locks, the bright eyes of the now infirm Rector. How proud she was of his reading, then considered fine even by the professional "parson judger" of the village—a man who described himself as one who had been "a judgin' parsons all 's loife, and wurna' goin' to take to bein' too soft wi' 'em now—not he!" How proud she was of his sermons, of his tact and gentleness in the sick-room, of Lord Whimperdale's markedly courteous manner to him!

Oh she could remember it all, and imagine what a terrible wrench it would have been if any dreadful thing had happened to make her, the Rector's own Penelope—his "little Pen," as he used to call her—steal out of the house that was then so fresh and pretty, and never come back any more.

Besides all this, some slight remorse was at work in Mrs Sweetapple's heart. It is always very unpleasant, no matter how much we dislike a person, when we have spoken harsh words to them, been intentionally unpleasant

to them, and then—and then some great misfortune has overwhelmed them. Of course it is all nonsense to feel as if we really had had anything to do with the catastrophe, and yet somehow we can't shake off the feeling that we have. Mrs Sweetapple would have given a good deal to have blotted out those peevish, unkindly words of hers, uttered in her first interview with young Mrs Granger ; the memory of them made her feel as though she were, metaphorically, walking about with a dried pea in her boot, after the uncomfortable manner of the saints of old.

So she looked exceedingly grave as her husband spoke of John Granger's sorrow ; and Will, knowing nothing of the past, thought within himself what a sympathetic woman she was.

After a little silence—a silence that throbbed with feeling — the Rector started another subject.

“ Mrs Sweetapple and myself are going for a drive. Can we take you anywhere ? ” he said genially to Will.

Mrs Sweetapple gently and furtively twitched her spouse's sleeve.

But alas! that excellent man was like the Israelite of old—in him there was found no guile, not yet any manner of subtlety.

"What is it, my dear?" he said, turning a face of gentle amaze upon his better-half. "I assure you I brushed my coat before I left the study."

"Nothing—nothing at all, my love," said Mrs Sweetapple, while Melissa coloured high, and really looked so charming with that additional glow upon her face, that Will could not take his eyes off her.

He quite started as the Rector renewed his offer of a friendly lift.

"No—er—I thank you," he stammered. "I believe Miss Sweetapple is to dine at Steadly this evening, and the carriage—in fact, Lady Whimperdale is going to send for her early, and I—er—promised Lady Whimperdale I would escort her—in fact, go with her—you see; otherwise——"

"Ah yes; I see," chuckled the Rector

“quite a little plot. Why, Penelope, you never told me the child was going to Steadly?”

At this juncture, happily perhaps, the brick-dust-coloured hind-quarters and whisking tail of the Rectory pony appeared before the window as a fixture, his hog-maned head and obstinate-looking ears having previously passed like a flash.

This feat was the wizened boy's delight; namely to rush the animal along, and then bring him up short just at the doorway.

The worthy couple were soon safely ensconced in the roomy trap, and when, first the pony's reluctance to start at all, and then his rooted objection to passing through the gate, had been overcome, set off merrily down the road.

“That's the worst of Bucephalus,” said Melissa to Will as the two watched the rapidly departing vehicle out of sight; “he's so deceitful. You'd imagine he was going to keep up that pace for the next hour, but in all probability, before he reaches the turn of the lane he'll be fixed with his head over a rail,

and poor pa will be calling him any number of sweet names to encourage him, while ma stands up — looking — oh ! so wobbly — and whips him all the while."

Mr Pierrepont did not, however, seem to take any interest in the peculiarities of Bucephalus.

He was looking as nearly cross as his bright young face was capable of.

"May I ask who this young (I presume he is young) Mr Budd is, of whom your father was speaking?"

The demureness of Melissa was a sight to see.

She seated herself once more in the swing chair, but not a swing she gave it; rather her downcast eyes and folded hands were suggestive of a Quakeress at "meeting."

"He is the Vicar of Great Gadsby."

"Ah,"—(with an intonation that seemed to say, "it's like his impudence, too")—"seems rather a—frump, eh?"

"He is the son of a dear old friend of my father's—the only son."

"You have a great regard for him, I see, Miss Sweetapple," with intense but suppressed wrath.

"I look upon him as an adopted brother."

No dove ever cooed more softly than the Rector's daughter; no nun was ever half so staid and subdued.

"And he—does he look upon you as an—ahem!—adopted sister?"

"He has never opened his mind to me upon the subject."

As she uttered this last remark Melissa altered her tactics. She raised her large bright eyes full to Will's face, looking at him with a sort of haughty amaze.

"Miss Sweetapple," he said, "I am a jealous fool. I feel I am making an ass of myself."

"Then don't do it any more," said Melissa.

"The fact is I can't help it. I have been here—in this part of the country, I mean—now for about a month, and it seems like—like a lifetime."

"I am so sorry. I really did not fancy you had found the time go so slowly."

"You know I don't mean that ; you must see—you must know. Why, bless my heart, Miss Sweetapple, can't you understand that I mean I have learnt so much—felt so much—lived as I never did before ? In the midst of all my sorrow and despair something seemed to say to me : 'Seek her out, find her, give her the message Kate left for her ; she will sympathise with you, she will help you.'"

"Meaning me ?" said Melissa suddenly, with an arch sweetness, her eyes not guiltless of the sheen of unshed tears ; "meaning me, Mr Pierrepont ?"

"Meaning you, Miss Sweetapple. Who else should I mean ? To whom else did my dear cousin send that last sweet message ? She must have loved you very much to think and speak of you like that, and, indeed, Miss Sweetapple, I feel as if I had known you for years and years—as if I had known you all my life—as if we had grown up together."

"But we haven't," said Melissa, trembling.

"No, you see that's just where the remarkable part of it lies. If we had been brought

up together there would be nothing extraordinary in my feeling as if we had ; it's my feeling so when we haven't that shows there's a sort of—a sort of fate, don't you know, in the whole thing."

We have always seen Melissa perfectly self-possessed under whatever circumstances she might be placed. We have had reason to look upon Melissa as what is generally called "a cool hand."

But Melissa was not self-possessed, Melissa was not cool—now.

A strange wave of feeling seemed gathering about her, and taking possession of her whether she would or not. She girded against it, and yet it fascinated and charmed her.

She did not know it, but she was fighting for her maiden freedom. Love was the strange guest within her heart that was striving to tame her high and proud young spirit, as the hand of the captor tames the fluttering bird.

She had often thought how quickly the days had passed since Kate's cousin Will came to Steadly. She would not have acknowledged

it, even under the application of thumbscrews, but she had grown to listen for a step, to hanker after a voice, to fancy that a day was somehow an empty kind of day in which she did not see Will Pierrepont. She could not even play the organ properly on Sunday because she knew he was in the Steadly pew. The "dither" itself was not more shaky than she; and all these things were very new to Melissa.

She wondered how it was that she felt so different in the presence of, say, Mr Budd, and in that of young Pierrepont. Mr Budd never made her heart leap up with a thud, and then beat as faintly as if it were going to stop altogether—not he! Why, then, should the other?

Could it be that she, Melissa Sweetapple, sauciest, freest, most thoughtless of maidens, was in love?

"Why so silent these days, my child?" said the Rector to her very tenderly one evening.

"Oh, pa, ducky, I've so much to think of!" she answered, with her arm about his neck,

and her face hidden against his shabby old coat.

And that was just the truth of it.

She had so much to think of.

Kate — Bonnie Kate — gone from their midst, they knew not whither ; lost, as you might drop a flower by the wayside and never see it more ; lost, the sweetest, truest, dearest woman she had ever known, and now the task set her of trying to read her own heart—that book that puzzled her so sadly, and was writ in a strange language, marvellous in her eyes.

Katharina tamed was the meekest of God's creatures. Your high-spirited woman flings herself at the feet of the man she loves with an abandon unknown to your meek and gentle, putty-faced girl, who looks as if she couldn't say bo! to a goose, and yet holds her own with the tenacity of indiarubber.

So with Melissa.

She grew timid as a fawn ; she said to herself it could not be that this bright, glorious creature, daring and brave, chivalrous and tender, loved her, the daughter of a country

home, unskilled in the ways of the world, hasty and untutored in speech, dressed in gowns stitched by her own fingers; and yet—and yet——”

He came so often, and he stayed so long; he made out the walk from Steadly (miles and miles) a “mere stroll”; he seemed so happy by her side. . . .

Anyhow those last words of his pierced her through and through.

“A sort of fate in the whole thing——”

A strange thought came over her. She remembered the old farm, and the motto that clasped it round: “God’s Providence is My Inheritance.”

Was this God’s Providence for her? Was this—this great and wonderful love—a sacred gift, coming into her life like a strain of beautiful music, making the very air she breathed sweet and melodious as the woods in spring?

By this time Melissa was too far gone to make merry at anyone’s expense; she hadn’t a spark of drollery left in her. Her hands

were cold, though the sunshine streamed royally into the shabby, comfortable old room ; her lips were tremulous ; her eyes kept growing misty.

She couldn't have made a joke, though her life depended on it, which shows to what a pass things had come with Melissa. She determined to answer him according to his own mood. She got up, and came and stood beside him, tall, slender, proud in the spotless purity of her maidenhood, yet timid in the shadow of the coming womanhood that was touching her fair, sleek head.

"I am glad you feel to me as if we had known each other all the time, as if we had grown up together ; for I feel so, too, to you. I feel that I can say to you all that is in my heart about your Cousin Kate, and I want you to listen to me for a little while—only a little while."

"Miss Sweetapple," he broke out, looking all at once as if he had been running hard and had just stopped, "I could listen for ever."

But she made a little sudden gesture of the hand, that told him in a moment she was not wanting to speak of herself, or for him to do so—not just yet. Her eyes had a rapt, serious earnestness new to them—and to him, meeting them.

"Mr Pierrepont," she said, "your cousin is not dead, and you and I must find her."

"Not dead!" he said, coming close to her, and staring hard into her face—"not dead! You speak as though you had certain knowledge, as though you had seen her."

"So I have," she answered; "I have seen her not once but many times, in a strange dream that comes to me again and again, and I know the dream is true. Mr Pierrepont, sometimes our own longing is so great, so intense, that it gives us the gift of second sight."

"You speak in parables, Miss Sweetapple."

"Do I?" she said, a dreamy smile lighting up her face as might the soft, subdued shimmer of moonlight. "They are not parables to me. Listen, and I will tell you."

Melissa pressed her hand upon her eyes. She stood there like a young sybil, and Will watched her as a worshipper watches the idol he adores.

“There is a long, low shore, with the sea creeping over it in long, low, ripples. Trees grow very near the shore—almost down to the edge of the tide. A little chapel stands only a space away, and through its pointed windows shines a small, steady light. I have seen her, your cousin, standing on that shore, seen her looking out across the sea with such a yearning look upon her face that I have known she was thinking of those who love her. I have seen her wave her hand, as though in greeting, seen her turn away, seen the still light from the chapel windows touch her as she passed, and then, striving vainly to follow her, woke, with my heart beating as though it would burst, and with the cold sweat of fear upon my face. I have dreamt this, not once, but over and over again, and I know—I know that it is true.”

By this time Will was leaning his elbows on

the mantelshelf, and his face was hidden in his hands.

She touched him lightly on the shoulder, forgetting in her earnestness the shyness of the past.

"Think," she said, "of the sorrow that has come upon so many ; of the breaking heart of John Granger, of his shattered life ; of the terrible grief that has but now made the old farmhouse so desolate ; of Humbie, of yourself, of me : think of all these, and say that you will help me. Oh, Mr Pierrepont, I must find her—I must ! God will show me the way. He will put some power into my hand. Only say that you believe me, say that you trust me. Let us think what we can do ; how we can set about it. Never mind how many have failed before us ; let us try—together."

The last word came very, very softly to his ear, and then he raised his head and looked at her ; he put his arm about her shoulders and drew her closely to him.

"I will help you, Melissa, with all my heart and soul if you will tell me with those

dear lips that are so near me now, that you will give me the right to help you in every trouble that may come to you as long as my life and yours shall last. Will you give me this right, my darling, just because I love you so very, very dearly ? ”

She did not speak.

Surely in these latter days a great exposition of silence had come over Melissa !

But her eyes met his, long and earnestly ; and then he bent to her and kissed her on the mouth ; and Melissa kissed him back.

It was a strange, a solemn sort of betrothal, but none the less sweet for that.

CHAPTER VI.

“Only a line in the paper,
That somebody read aloud.”

HERE and there among the tangle and the trees was a dash of glow and fire. The great painter Nature was beginning to put in the colours of her landscape in deeper tints. Presently she would make it a study in black and white, with only one single bit of colour—Robin’s rosy breast gleaming among the snow-clad boughs; but the time for that was not yet.

The year was what is sometimes called “on the turn,” and you might notice a certain subdued hurry and fluster among the birds that comes over them when their instinct tells them winter is on the way, though not yet in sight. Perhaps they may be wondering whether a good store of hips and haws will be forthcoming, and if the juicy black berries of

the elder tree will be as plentiful as they ought to be, and these topics may call for much earnest conversation. I cannot say, but I have certainly often noticed this kind of quiet flutter in the bird world when first autumn touches the woods, and lights up here and there a glow that is but the signal of approaching death.

The little blue tit runs up the bark of the trees, like someone going upstairs in a mighty hurry ; the thrush puffs out his speckled breast and flies from bough to bough ; the rook walks miles and miles in stalking up and down the pasture-land ; and Robin—Robin doesn't flutter about much, but he sits on the rail and utters now and again one long, plaintive, pathetic note, his coronach over the summer that is dying and the long, sweet days that are closing in like the flowers—

“ Oh, the sad, sweet note that Robin sings
When the day begins to die,
When the shadows deepen, and the wind
Falls to a gentle sigh.”

Kate found herself many a time and oft

fancying how the swaying wreaths of the virginian-creeper on the house at Kensington were growing ruddy here and there, how the massed trees about Low Cross Farm were patched with splashes of fiery red or glowing amber. She always tried to tear her mind from the past, and centre it upon the present ; but the old memories and the old associations asserted their power over her at times, and she would sit motionless with her head on her hand, lost in a reverie, from which she would rouse herself to find Friend Benjamin's child eyes watching her with tender and wistful amaze. When he saw she noticed him he would come timidly forward and offer her a posy he had been busily gathering, or perhaps lay it down beside "little son's" velvet-soft cheek, and then point to it, and laugh the low, guttural laugh of pleasure peculiar to him when happy.

It was strange how the baby had come to be known by one name only — "little son." He was everyone's "little son," the precious possession of the whole house of Dromore.

Even the carrier asked after him in the same quaint fashion, looking admiringly at Biddy's smiling face as he handed in his parcels.

"And how's the 'little son' after getting on, the cratur?"

"Oh, he's rare and foine," would Biddy say, "and such a soizable child too! Why, it's the arms of me that's after aching when I've carried him for ten minutes up and down the grass walk."

This she would say with a sly eye at the carrier and a watchful, lest she should detect the smallest lurking grin upon his Hibernian countenance; but she watched in vain, for he couldn't have looked more serious had he been at Mass, and happily Biddy could not see him when he was safely inside the hood of his cart and off round the corner.

"Ah, but he's got a believing sowl; he's great faith entoirely," she would say to herself as she watched the vehicle depart, little wotting that the hood was like charity, and covered a multitude of sins.

It was wonderful how ingenious Friend

Benjamin showed himself in the way of devising amusements for "little son," and what quiet happiness he found in the (supposed) appreciation of that potentate for the same. Not being knowledgeable in the ways of the very young of the human species, he put all sorts of remarkable constructions on the child's every action, calling upon the bystanders to admire its intelligence and many virtues. No one knew whence came into existence at this particular time a sort of small flute, whose gamut consisted of five weird, plaintive notes; but no doubt, from the frequency with which the unpretending instrument discoursed "most excellent music" among the tangled, shadowy pathways of the old garden, the birds thereabout must have imagined that a new and wonderful addition to their community had taken place.

It was strange, too, how those five dropping notes became inexplicably associated in Kate's mind with the whole life at Dromore. Biddy would sit on an old-fashioned wooden chair out in the sunshine with "little son" upon her

ample lap, and hard by Friend Benjamin, seated like some sylvan fawn, in the fork of an ancient tree, or squatted contentedly on the mossy turf, would try to charm his idol with a diet of sweet sounds.

Every now and then he would cease playing, go on tip-toe to Biddy's side, and peer into the little, quiet face, so unlike all other babies' faces, in which were set the wonder of those great, dark eyes, so strangely full of pathos for eyes that had as yet only looked upon the world for a few short weeks.

Sunday mornings were times of vast content to Benjamin, for then two figures clad in dove-coloured garments, with long silk shawls and tunnel-like bonnets of the same hue, would set off down the road that led into the city, and he — Benjamin Worthy — be left in solemn charge of the dear lady and the "little son."

Alas! poor Benjamin little knew that this giving in charge was but a binding him with fetters of love and honour that his sisters knew would prove more sure than chains of iron or cords of hemp. With hearts that beat lightly

—that is, as lightly as Quaker hearts can or should—in their bosoms, the two set out on the long tramp that ended in a small paved court, where the sad-coloured meeting-house swallowed up the sad-coloured figures, and whence, upon certain solemn occasion, Friend Worthy would emerge after meeting with such a light upon her face as made one understand the shining on the face of Moses after he had talked with God—in other words, lifted up his own heart in meditation and supplication, until it seemed to touch the very heaven itself.

Meanwhile, Friend Benjamin would do his best to make up for the lack of gates at the great gate-posts, for so often did he steal on tip-toe, to be wary and circumvent the enemy should that desperate character be lurking in ambush, and call for a “surprise movement,” that he took quite a long walk between the seat beneath the cedar and the gates that ought to have been there and weren’t. He would even go so far as to prod the bossy green bushes on the way down, and gaze, almost to the oversetting of his own equili-

brium, into the sky overhead, because, most unfortunately, the book the lady had given him contained a picture of a little child being carried away by an eagle. Benjamin had had a long disputation with himself as to the possibility of the great bird with the hooked nose being an emissary of good to convey the pictured infant to the abode of bliss "above the stars"; but he finally came to the conclusion that it would be highly objectionable to allow any bird, however taking or highly gifted, to fly away with "little son," and recognised the urgent need of keeping a watch above as well as below.

The fiction that Kate's little one was a monstrously fine baby was consistently kept up by faithful Biddy, and even allowed to pass in silence by Friend Faith, while Prue openly encouraged it.

"Sure and it's after finding a new name for him we'll have to be, the darlint!" would Biddy exclaim, lifting him gingerly in her arms as though afraid lest her strength might succumb under his weight; "we'll have to be

after calling him the ‘big little son,’ God bless him! or folks will never be after knowin’ who we’re manin’. I showed him to the carrier the night before this one, and he couldn’t believe his eyes at all, at all. ‘So young,’ says he, ‘and such a size! The saints be good to us!’ says he. ‘He’s a young Methusalem entoirely!’”

But Kate, after listening to all this tender “blarney,” and much more like it, would have to turn her head aside to hide the tears in her eyes, and once safely alone with her babe, kiss the little waxen cheek on which the long dark lashes showed like ebony, and hold the tiny hand pressed against her lips as though to stay their trembling.

The silence and the calm of everything in the life around her was healing the sore wounds in Kate’s heart, dissipating, too, those mists that had gathered about her mental vision and prevented her seeing clearly the demarcation between right and wrong—between what was real and what was only the product of a misguided imagination.

There were no newspapers at Dromore, no talk about the world outside the lichen-covered walls of the tangled garden. It was indeed an innovation that the customers at the "tables" should ask after "Mrs Sinclair" and the "little son." But the sisters were indulgent so far, looking upon it that the sudden advent of a baby in their midst was an event calculated to disturb the calm even of the deepest pool.

Before this event conversation had been strictly limited to the business in hand, and to what Biddy called "passing the time of day."

Kate's fingers were seldom idle. Endless were the fairy garments to be fashioned for "little son"; wonderful the warm and cosy raiment with which he needed to be fortified for his journey "over seas." Then a lovely Irish poplin, the colour of a dove's breast, had been got from a celebrated mart in Grafton Street—got secretly—and was being worked at secretly in the seclusion of Kate's room; fashioned after true Quaker lines, and yet with

a certain chic and go about it that suggested Prue to you, even if you had not been told for whom it was destined.

There was something indeed about Prue altogether that very closely attracted Mrs Sinclair; a certain jauntiness—if such a word can be used without sacrilege to a member of the Society of Friends—a determination to carry things off in the best manner, and to show a brave face to the little world about her.

“A garden has to run wild for years and years before such groundsel as that can grow in it, thee knows,” she one day said, as the two paced the mossy walks.

Prue was gently boastful of the crop in question, and had quite an air, as though the dear old garden had been let run riot of its own sweet will, by deep design, and in order to produce a treat for the canaries of the neighbourhood.

“Neighbour Grantly often asks for a spray or two for her songsters, and she’ll say to me, ‘There’s no groundsel to be got like yours, Miss

Prudence.' Oh yes, she says 'Miss Prudence.' It's not right, thee knows, for her to call me so, but she's a heedless and worldly body, and means nothing harmful."

These little chats and many like them always came about when Friend Faith was not of the company, and had a fearful joy for Friend Prue.

On one side of the garden wall was a plum-tree, stretching out long arms so far that on one side it had to turn the corner, and in spring made quite a two-sided room of snowy blossom for the bees to revel in and the birds to nestle in.

This plum-tree was evidently looked upon by the sisters of Dromore as a most important item in their family possessions, and it was pretty to hear them dating this or that small event by its then condition.

"Nay, thee knows it couldn't have been in autumn time, for the tree was white with blossom;" or, "That was in the fall of the year, for the plums were purple. Don't thee mind how Biddy brought one in on a leaf, with a

great wasp right in its heart, and how angered she was with the poor insect that meant nothing harmful?" or yet again: "That was in winter; there was not a leaf on the plum-tree, and all the red wall showing in between the boughs."

In such still lives as theirs the only changes are those of the seasons; the great events the bursting of the bud, the unfurling of the frond, the blossoming of the flower, the fall of the leaf, the gentle snow-shroud laid upon the sleeping world.

No other book being near, the book of Nature is so lovingly studied, so persistently read, that it is known off by heart, word for word.

Kate was never weary listening to her hosts' placid talk of the old neglected garden and its teeming store of wonders. Happily for her, the General had trained her to take a keen interest in little things; to find a real pleasure in what was nearest at the moment—a power for which neither man nor woman can be too thankful.

Friend Benjamin would lead her all over the pretty wilderness in pursuit of a blue dragon-fly, not to catch and slay, that would have seemed a sort of murder in his eyes, but just to watch it settle, all of a quiver, like a rainbow in the sunlight, on the bosom of a flower. He would hold her back half fearfully by the hand, lest she should scare it from its perfumed couch. Once he brought her in a little brown owl, the daintiest bunch of mottled feathers ever seen, and in their midst two eyes like golden stars; then, when she had admired it enough, he carried it away again, climbed to the fork of an old wide-girthed tree, and put it tenderly back into a hollow in the bole.

And so the summer had worn away, and now the autumn was at hand; the plums were purple on the wall; the tips of the tree-boughs made "sunshine in a shady place;" yet Kate still lingered at Dromore. More than one letter had come from over the sea full of love and longing, like Hiawatha's love song, asking no questions, pleading for no explanations.

And yet Kate did not make a start.

She said to herself that she shrank from leaving her gentle friends ; that to take “ little son ” away from Dromore would be to make it desolate indeed ; that Friend Benjamin would fall into his “ moods ” again ; wander away for days — the while the sisters never slept and scarcely ate, and Biddy spent all her earnings in burning candles before the altar in the chapel by the sea—returning at last in rags and tatters, led by some kindly wanderer not much keener-witted than himself. Prue would miss her too ; and lose the keen delight of those little worldly conversations in Mrs Sinclair’s room that had for her a fearful joy. Kate dare not say even to herself that Friend Faith would miss her, that would have been to presume too much. But here it is very probable that Mrs Sinclair was at fault. She could not gauge the depth of feeling and affection hidden under the Quakeress’s chastened bearing. If it were good for the dear stranger who had sojourned within their gates to leave them,

Friend Faith's hand would not be stretched out to detain her ; but I could not vouch that when " talking to the stars " one pure pellucid tear would not have stolen down the pale fair cheek outlined by the Quaker cap. Perhaps Friend Faith herself hardly realised how closely the stranger and " little son " had crept into her closely guarded heart. Perhaps she hardly realised how the touch of the little velvet fingers closing round her own had stirred all the latent motherhood in her nature, or what a sense of blankness would fall upon her when Kate's clear eyes should look at her no more, and the soft *frou-frou* of the dainty worldly dresses should no more make soft music about the old house. It was not Friend Faith's method to let herself go in the way of attaching herself too closely to anything in this material world ; but, unconsciously to herself, the lines that bound her to the young mother and the little child deepened and strengthened ; her life had become like some scene along which a wayfarer passes with eyes upraised to the glowing hills towards which he

journeys, and all at once he becomes conscious of a strain of ravishing sweetness filling all the air about him. So softly has it stolen on his senses that he hardly knows when or where it took its first rise ; he steps onward, falling unconsciously into the swing of its cadence ; it has become a part of the very air he breathes. He does not think about it—he only feels it, but when it ceases, his ear aches with the silence. Then he knows what the sweetness has been.

“Do you know, Friend Faith,” said Kate to her one day, as the two sat out in the garden that was so fair a parlour with its garniture of autumn leaves, “you are very like someone who is very different.”

“Thee hast not lived in our Green Isle for nothing,” said Friend Faith, with a smile.

“Yes, I know that sounds like a very Irish speech,” returned Kate, laughing so that “little son,” who was lying placidly sleeping on her lap, opened his big eyes, and put a little pink palm against her face ; “but it is just what I

mean. You are like someone who was very good to me long ago, or it seems long ago—like Lady Whimperdale of Steadly.”

Then Kate caught her breath. The sound of her own voice uttering the old familiar name hit her like a stinging nettle.

“I am glad Neighbour—what is it?—Whimperdale was good to thee. But I care not to be likened to any of the great ones of the world. I walk in sheltered ways, and know not of much that lies beyond these walls that gird us in.”

“Yes,” said Kate, “that is what I meant; it is all so different, and yet I think—I know it is the shining of the same light from heaven; it is the indwelling spirit of the Master; the spirit of a never-failing love, and a sympathy that is ever ready; and these things write themselves——”

“Dost thee not think it grows full late for ‘little son’ to be out among shadows that are growing?” said Friend Faith, rising to her feet as she spoke, and bending over the still sleeping face clipped round by the soft wool

hood, with its jaunty rose-pink cockade and rose-hued border.

Kate, feeling herself repressed, rose also, carried "little son" into the house, left him in faithful Biddy's care, and set off—by no means a rare thing, indeed, for her to do—upon a solitary ramble.

She loved to wander alone by the sea, to listen to the sob of the ripple on the sand, the cry of the sea-mew piercing the grey mist that floated in the offing. She loved to watch the little red-sailed boats drifting before the wind, as she herself had drifted before an overpowering influence whose breath, alas! was not of heaven.

This night, as the light faded from the land, lingering on the water in a flush of palest gold, the still shining of the lamp within the little chapel—the lamp that was ever burning night and day—glowed like a pale star among the shadows, while from within came the subdued chant and swing of many voices, their cadence floating gently out across the sea.

Lucis, creator optime
Lucem dierum proferens
Primordiis lucis novae
Mundi parans originem
Qui mane junctum vesperi
Diem vocari praecipis
Illabitur tetrum chaos
Audi preces cum fletibus.

Was she not indeed wandering in the darkness, longing for light? Was it not being borne in upon her how far—how very far—from the pathway whereon the blessed light of heaven falls all soft and radiant her erring feet had wandered?

Illabitur tetrum chaos—that was indeed the story of her own heart; well might her prayers go up with tears out of the gloom that had gathered around her.

For the first time Kate set in black and white before her own eyes the true reason that was holding her back from further wandering, that kept her lingering on at Dromore. She was loth to cross the sea—the great pathless sea that is to all of us the symbol of distance and bitter parting. She shrank from setting its storm-tossed depths between herself and the

man she had deserted, just because she had not had the courage to take the rough with the smooth—to face the difficulties that met her at every turn.

True, she had condoned her own sin to herself by saying that John would be better without her—that she was, in fact, placing on her own brow the crown of martyrdom in tearing herself away from his side.

But as water that is troubled is turbid for awhile, so that we cannot see through it, and, being at rest, regains its clearness and brightness, so in the quiet of the life at Dromore, and, above all, in the dear companionship of Friend Faith, Kate was learning to look into the past and read it clearly.

Cowardice, impatience, self-love—these were the evil trinity that she recognised as the true motives that had driven her upon a fatal course—these, and a lack of the love that “endureth all things.”

She had told herself in the days that were past how dearly she loved John Granger ; she had questioned herself as to her capabilities

of making him happy ; she had thought to lose herself in another—to merge her life in his ; but when the first sharp trouble came, when the first sharp breath of trial made itself felt, what a poor thing this love of hers proved to be ! John deceived her—deceived her “because he loved her so dear,” and she—she could not forgive him.

Her mean, pitiful love could not rise to magnanimity ; why, it scarce deserved to be called love, since it failed so utterly — so miserably !

The tears dimmed her eyes ; the sea and the mist trembled before her, and still the vesper hymn rang on—the hymn that is of no Church and no creed, but is the glorious possession of all humanity—the cry of those who wander among the shadows for the light that shineth from above :—

“Thick flows the flood of darkness down ;
Oh, hear us when we weep and pray,
Thou blest Creator of the day.”

The little congregation of evening worshippers were straggling out into the dusk—the

grey, mysterious gloaming from whose midst came up the whispering voice of the sea—before Kate turned her steps towards Dromore.

Her heart had been deeply stirred. Thoughts of the old home swarmed and clung about her, a sad-faced crowd of ghostly visitants, they seemed to press close to her, lifting reproachful faces, intangible yet full of uncanny, eerie life, to her own. The faint mist through which she was passing took strange shapes that seemed to beckon to her with waving, indefinite hands. Impatient with her own perturbed state of mind, with that highly-strung nervous condition best described as being “fey,” she strove to shake it off. She brought forward before the tribunal of her own thoughts still more of the reasons that had kept her stationary so long, and so prevented her following out her programme of intentions to the end.

There was Friend Faith. No striving after undue influence—or, indeed, any influence at all—had that dear lady betrayed at any time. Rather the reverse. She seemed to shrink

from relying on, or being conscious of, her own personality too much for that; and yet there was no resisting her. Living beside her day by day was like walking with a strong, tender, loving hand for ever clasping yours and leading you whither it would.

The assured certainty with which she spoke of the waiting attitude of a child towards a loving father being the attitude of a faithful soul towards the Father in Heaven constrained you and encompassed you round, whether you would or no. The patient listening for the voice of the Spirit that guides and counsels men made you listen—almost unconsciously at first—for the echo of that “still, small voice.”

Kate had felt at times as though she could never brave the ordeal of meeting the grave, steadfast eyes of the gentle Quakeress, and saying, while they looked at her:

“I am going to start on my further journey; I am going to put the sea between me and——”

How should she end the sentence? Why, the truth would be dragged from her, though

that other should speak not a word. She would finish her story thus :

“I am going still further astray ; I am going to leave behind me duties forsaken, hearts riven, resolves and vows torn to rags and tatters. I am going to say to myself and to others : ‘I must live for my child alone.’ But God, who reads the heart, and cannot be deceived by the utterance of the lips, will know that what I am going to do is to live for self—self—self ! Nothing higher and nothing better. He will know that, because the path I chose was not all of flowers, because here and there a sharp thorn pricked my feet, because in places the way was steep and narrow, I turned aside, longing for some vale of ignoble rest, where struggle should exist no longer, and neither will nor fancy should be crossed.”

This said, she would fall prone at the feet of the silent woman whose eyes were “homes of silent prayer,” she would entreat her to speak out loud in just condemnation.

Two spirits warred within this tortured

woman's heart—the pride that loathed defeat, and the passionate longing to walk once more in the path of right and duty.

Absorbed in her own thoughts she had not noticed how the white milky mist that on that coast drifts in so suddenly, from the sea, had deepened and thickened about her. It was only when she came to a spot where three roads diverged that she realised she could hardly see as far as her hand could reach. She knew that the low-lying coast was behind her, and turned to make sure that from thence came the far-off sough of the sea, and in a moment all sense of the locality of sound was lost.

The murmur of the waters was all round her, singing in her ears, throbbing in her brain. She knew there were some old sand-pits near; places, in which the peat had been dug out to deep, uneven depths. Which way should she turn? Just then five sweet falling notes came out of the heart of the grey gloom.

“Friend Benjamin!” she cried; “have you come to look for me? I am here.”

Again came the flute notes, plaintive and low ; again Kate answered them ; and then a figure loomed through the fog, a figure looking strange and ghostly enough with its outlines all blurred and its size magnified almost miraculously.

But Kate saw the long white hair and the child face, and stretching out her hand met Friend Benjamin's friendly grasp.

"I came to seek you," he said. "Why do you wander like this, and leave us to sorrow ? I let the flute call to you, for it can speak better than I can, and I thought you would know its voice."

"Did they send you ?" said Kate, as hand-in-hand the two paced homewards.

"No," he said, "I came myself. No one knew but Biddy ; she said 'little son' was sobbing in his sleep, and she feared some evil had befallen you, since he was keening so. She told me not to fright the others. Faith was talking to the stars. I saw her sitting in her room, with her hands in her lap. The stars are gone though, now, are they not ?" he went on,

peering upwards into the clouds that floated and swayed and twisted above their heads ; “but Faith says they are there all the same, though we cannot see them ; they are shining ever so brightly beyond the darkness. I am glad of that. I am glad they never go out. They are God’s lamps.”

Friend Benjamin knew every step of the way. No fear he would lead Kate into sand-pits or peat-holes. The “simple one” is often dowered with a sort of extra sense that gives him a wonderful conversance with Nature and her every haunt. If you had blindfolded Friend Benjamin he would have found his way all about Dromore and for miles round as easily as though he had the full use of his eyes ; a knowledge that was the outcome of infinite ramblings in every possible direction, and cunning notice of every bush and briar, beck and bank.

Before, however, Dromore was reached they came to the edge of the mist, where in long and jagged fringes it trailed along the meadows and above the hedgerows.

"I am always finding you," said Benjamin, with a soft low chuckle, as they went through the porch.

"Indeed you are," said Kate, "and you are always good to me."

He took his broad-brimmed hat off, bending low in an old-fashioned, chivalrous salute, and stood there bareheaded watching her as she went in and up the stairs.

"Glory be, and it's myself that's glad to see ye back again," cried Biddy, "and 'little son' sobbing fit to burst himself, and him aslape, the darlint, all the blessed time! 'Go,' says I to Mr Benjamin, 'and seek her out; the fog's after coming up from the say, and it's like enough to ketch hold on her.' Were ye down by the chapel, and did ye hear the vespers now? Don't they sing lovely? and isn't Father Delany the beautiful praste entoirely? Ah, but he's the crafty one too. When I was a slip of a colleen, and went to confess meeself to him—'Father,' says I, 'I laughed in chapel.' 'I saw ye,' says he. 'Father,' says I, 'I pulled Honora's gownd to make her laugh same as me.'

‘I saw ye,’ says he, and with that I up and fled, and never stopped a pace till I got home and hid my head in my mother’s lap. Ah, he’s an old man now, is Father Delany, but he never forgets he was once the broth of a boy himself, and he’s mighty gentle wi’ the young, God bless him! Once he saw me tying a knot o’ ribbon on the tree beside the wishin’ well. ‘And is it a swateheart you’re after wishin’ for, Biddy Magrath?’ says he. So I stood there and crumpled up my apron, so modest like you never saw, and ‘Father,’ says I, ‘what may a swateheart be?’ ‘A fruit,’ says he, ‘my child, that if it’s plucked too early is sour in the mouth.’ Ah, but he’s the sensible one, is Father Delany, and well he knew what I was afther, and me not fifteen by the clock. But I weary you with my chatter,” said Biddy suddenly, with a sharp glance at Mrs Sinclair’s pale, tired face; “and here’s ‘little son’ wi’ his blessed eyes wide open lookin’ at his mammy. Here goes to take him up. Sure, and they that has to lift ye, my jewel, needs to have a strong back.”

Biddy did not look at her mistress as she made this last astounding statement; but then, her face was buried in the baby's neck, and she was cuddling him up to her breast, so she couldn't very well.

All through the rest of that evening the feeling of being under some strange irresistible influence clung to Kate in spite of herself. The story of her wanderings in the mist was told, and Prue made some gentle jest about the sound of the shepherd's pipe in the meadows bringing home the lost sheep. Benjamin, with his flute sticking out of the breast-pocket of his drab coat, assisted at the recital, and laughed to himself as he cut out a flight of wild ducks, so true to life that their wings seemed stirred by the wind against which they flew.

And so the evening passed, and the hour came when all the lights were low, and the bolts of the old-fashioned door were in their rests. Kate was very weary. Mental conflict takes it out of us more than many miles.

“ Little son ” slept the sweet sleep of infancy. Little pink palm under soft baby cheek, the faintest flush upon the dear wee face ; the rosebud lips apart to let the milky breath come and go ; tiny rings of silken hair upon the waxen brow damp with the gentle sweat of sleep.

The mother should have been resting beside him, but, with a shower of soft, close kisses upon the hand that lay outside the coverlet, she had moved away to the window, where the blind was still undrawn.

There was no trace of the mist left now. God’s lamps shone clear and bright amid the purple of the sky, and over the sea, that was but a faint grey distant line, hardly discernible, hung the pale crescent moon.

In the beauty and the silence of the night the phantoms of the past crowded once more about Kate’s heart and memory, and one special incident of her short married life came so vividly before her as to be almost a scene enacted before her very eyes.

John had been ill, over-anxious about a "case," sleepless for nights. Then came a night when towards the early hours he slept heavily, as those sleep who have been denied the boon of rest for some while back. Kate lay wakeful and watching, fearful lest some baying dog or noisy wanderer of the night should break his slumber. It seemed to her that he was safer while she thus kept vigil. His breathing, hurried at first, grew calmer. She was so thankful, lying there in the silence. Then the dawn began to define the window in the wall—grew to a pale grey light that touched and showed the profile and the dark head upon the pillow by her side. Softly she raised herself upon her elbow and watched, as the face she loved grew more and more distinct. It was like watching a picture grow beneath the hand of the artist.

But all at once, with a chill shudder, the thought came over Kate that John would look like that—so grow into distinctness and clearness as the day dawned—if he were gone from

her for ever, and lay dead in the flower and beauty of his manhood ; and with this thought came a keen cutting stab of pain, something that told her that if that were so indeed, then would death be hers as well, since her life would be henceforth a lifeless thing.

Full of this memory of the past that was in reality not so very far away, yet seemed divided by an eternity from the present hour, at last she lay down to sleep beside the "little son," but, sleeping, dreamed, and in her dream saw John lying still and motionless with the morning light upon his face. Touching that stirless face (still in her dream) she felt it cold with the cold that is like no other, shook him, clasped him in her arms, called upon his name, but knew all the while that neither kiss nor clasping could wake from that sleep that knows no earthly waking.

Kate woke with a cry.

The garish sun poured in through the window of which she had left the blind undrawn, and upon "little son," still softly

sleeping, its golden radiance seemed to smile.

Kate's brow was dank with sweat; she trembled and shook as one who is chilled to the marrow of the bones.

In a noble, determined effort to calm herself she took up a book from the table by her bed and strove to read.

"It will not be long," she thought, "before Biddy comes. I hear her stirring down below, and there is the click of Friend Prue's door. Prue is always the first astir."

The book she held in her hand had been brought to her by a lady only the day before, and she had not yet looked at it.

The cover was thriftily protected by a newspaper, and, as something caught her eye printed in clear large letters in its columns, Mrs Sinclair sprang from her bed, and stood stammering and staring by the sunshine-flooded window.

"Kate, Bonnie Kate, come back — come back! Your husband is lying grievously

sick, nigh unto death. Come back, come back !

MELISSA."

A strange figure, with a wealth of brown hair floating over its shoulders, with wild, wide eyes, white stricken face, and hands groping as if to find some stay, with long floating drapery clinging about its slender limbs, with bare feet spurning the old oak floor, rushed into Friend Faith's room, just as that dear lady had finished her morning meditation.

"Mrs Sinclair—Kate !" she cried, frightened for once out of her calm. "My child—my child ! what is it ?"

Kate was on her knees grasping Friend Faith's hands with painful tightness.

"Help me—help me !" she gasped. "My husband—the man whom I deserted—lies at the point of death ! Oh, my God ! have pity on me ! Let me not reach his side—too late !"

"I told thee," said Friend Faith, bending tenderly over her and clasping her—"I told

thee the dawn would come; and now——
Nay, weep not as those who have no hope;
God is good, His mercy is infinite—He gave
me back my Prue; and now—it is even as I
said—the Master calleth for thee.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

IT was a night of sudden showers and intervals of bright moonlight. The showers were sharp and sudden, the rain stinging the window-panes and splashing on the pavements, while the clouds tore across the sky at reckless speed, with long jagged fringes trailing out behind them. When the storm passed, and the moon shone out, her light made all the wet leaves shine like ebony studded with diamonds. Now and again soft, white scud, fine and transparent as a bride's veil, flitted across her face, only to add to its beauty. The gas-lamps were nowhere in the struggle for pre-eminence in the matter of giving out light, for what can you do—supposing you are a lamp—when you are all blown sideways, and made to burn in little jerks and flickers

by the impudence of the wind, that is up to all manner of pranks, and no respecter of persons? The dignity of a steady radiance is not to be attained to under the circumstances, and what right has the moon to crow and exult over you, as she so evidently does, since she is miles and miles out of reach of the impudent gale, and no unfeeling official with a long ladder comes to put her out, whether she likes it or not, in the early hours of the morning?

The lamp opposite the house in Kensington in which our interest centres, was several times in very bad case indeed, for, whiff! came the wind round the corner, the long arms of the virginia-creeper swung from side to side, lashing the windows as they swayed, and the lamp-flame bent and cowered, making a little bubbling sound of protest that the wind was utterly callous to. The horse in the doctor's brougham that stood at the gate of the house did not approve of this flickering just above his head, and as nobody took the slightest notice of his pawing the ground with an impatient hoof as a hint to the coachman to move on,

he thought the best thing he could do was to pull back a pace or two, and then move forward with a jerk, this being the most likely thing to make it uncomfortable for the man on the box.

However, the sudden tightening of the rein put an end to these manœuvres of his just as the house door opened and the doctor came out. One or two muffled-looking figures accompanied him to the door, and the wind brought the sound of a sentence to the manservant's ears.

“I wish I could say more.”

There are times, I think, when a doctor is greatly to be pitied; and surely one of these times is when a whole household hang upon his words, watch his looks, try even to interpret his silence, his nod, his frown, as though he were some oracle of old, and they the agonised devotees to whom his verdict meant life or death.

And that is just it—it is so often life or death; hope or despair; half-sobbing congratulations, when he is gone; or the strained,

tight handclasps that say what the tongue dares not utter.

At such times well may the thought arise in his heart—the words to his lips :

“ I wish I could say more.”

The muffled figures disappeared into the house, not, however, before one, a man tall and slightly built, detached himself from the rest, came out into the wet, shimmering night, and followed the doctor to the brougham door.

The man of healing with one foot on the step, turned sympathetically towards him.

“ I wish I could say more, but there is nothing more to say ; it all depends upon absolute quiet and his being able to take the nourishment at regular intervals.” Then he repeated the last but one injunction again, separating each syllable of the adjective : “ Ab-so-lute quiet. Good-night.”

The brougham door closed sharply, the impatient horse gave a spring forward that tightened the traces to straining, and then settled down into a steady trot.

The gas-light in the lamp by the gateway flared up with a gurgle, and glinted on bright hair and blue eyes, on the face of Will Pierrepont, attaché-designate to the Embassy at Vienna, grave with a gravity born of the past year's storm and change. Bright as a sail upon a sunlight river had been Will's life for many and many a year; the last of the record might indeed be labelled *sturm und drang*. But a little while back and he felt himself a light-hearted boy; now he was a man, with all a man's troubles and anxieties, with all the passion, and pain, and reality of life being pressed home to him day by day and hour by hour.

What a strong yearning was in the look he raised to the purple, star-gemmed sky—what a world of troubled thought in the sigh with which he turned towards the open door!

A hand caught at his sleeve as he entered; a sobbing voice appealed to him.

“Did he say anything more? He is so close; it seems useless to ask him anything.”

“There is nothing to say that he has not

said," replied Will, taking the clinging hand very tenderly in his own. That it was of the order of hands that irresistibly remind one of a bird's claw did not in the least degree affect the gentleness of his dealing with it. "We can do no more than we are doing—nothing! Absolute quiet and regular nourishment, and then perhaps the turn of the disease will come."

A sob only answered him, as the hand was drawn from his, and the questioner fled with a rush to some inner chamber.

How gladly would the watchers through that weary night have muffled the chimes of the church hard by—the chimes that had never seemed to ring so loud before!

When the gale came rushing with soft swirl round the corner, bringing with it the rain that stung and lashed the pane, they got up and went to the window, as though in some fond hope that their troubled faces might calm its sudden, intermittent fury. If a carriage or a cart rolled by they held their breath until the rattle died away in the distance.

Once a servant dropped some small thing in the kitchen, and so still was the whole house that the noise seemed to ring out like a clarion.

Here and there in the rooms that, like a faded beauty, had lost their charm and glamour, a few flowers, withered and dead, drooped their dejected heads, sadly emblematical of the hopes that were fading, even as those withered and neglected blossoms.

Severe illness in a house always gives that strange air of blight to rooms that have once echoed to the music of laughter and the rhythm of song. Not only is some loved presence absent—some presence that we miss, as we miss the sunshine when the clouds are dark above our heads—but the very air itself seems full of the spirit of waiting, faint and breathless with the suspense that makes our hearts beat low like muffled drums.

A wilder gust of wind, drifting a stinging shower of rain, and Will stole softly up the stairs, and, slipped so that his cautious feet

made no sound, listened a moment at the sick-room door.

Nurse and patient were alike still, and, with a feeling of thankfulness and hope gathering about his heart, he crept into the darkened drawing-room, where only a faint gleam from lowered jets made visible a sort of shadowy wraith of the room in which his cousin Kate had taken such a pride. There, on the very couch upon whose extremest edge Miss Libbie had uncomfortably ensconced herself on the first evening of her arrival in London town, Will, tired-out, weary with watching by day and night, threw himself down, and in a moment, as by a stroke, fell into a dead sleep, deep and dreamless—such a sleep as none but the tired-out watcher knows.

With the first chime of ten of the night from the church hard by his curly head touched the amber-coloured pillow. By the time the last note of the ten rang out he was asleep as soundly as a child cradled in its mother's lap.

An hour later he awoke as suddenly as he

had slept, raised himself upon his elbow, pushed back the hair from his brow, gazed in amaze at the shadowy shapes among which he found himself, and then gathered his wandering senses promptly, and sprang to his feet.

There was the sound of a subdued uproar below stairs, the murmur of hushed, yet madly excited voices, and then—how he never exactly knew—Will was at the stair-head—down the stairs—had clasped his arms about his cousin Kate, and was sobbing over her like a woman.

He would not have had the chance to do all this but that the two women, Aunt Libbie and (oh, strange companionship of a common sorrow!) — Miss Cynthia, were huddled together over a long white bundle carried in the arms of the most Irish-looking of Irish-women, whose mouth and eyes were preternaturally wide open, she being in a speechless state of amaze, or, as she subsequently expressed it, “just afther losing her senses.”

“And no wonder,” she would say, “if

you'd seen the way the two of them dragged the darlint about. If I hadn't held on to him hard and fast they'd have dragged the sowl out of his blessed little body; but I in wid myself to the foiresoide, and the two after me—same as the two whistling devils chased holy St Mungo—and I let on that I niver saw them at all, at all, but just put little sonnie's feet to the fire, and all the ten pink toes of him stretching out so lovely to the warmth; and if you'd belave me, all in a minute, as soon as the misthress was up the stairs and away, there were them two down on their knees a-kissin' and a-squeezin' of them blessed feet, and a-sighin' an' a-cryin' out: 'Look at the eyes of him now, and ain't they the spit o' the father's, now?' an' all under their breaths for fear of wakin' the sick gintleman. 'And what's his name?' says they; and 'Little son,' says I. 'Well, and he is shmall,' says they. 'Isn't he now, nurse?' 'Shmall!' says I; 'would ye look to see a baby of two months' old like a giant in a carryvan?' 'Shmall!' says I, 'he's counted

the finest child born in Green Dales these years back, and it's Friend Faith hersel' would stagger under the heft of him. Shmall?' says I! 'Did iver either of you have a baby o' your own that made a finer show at two months and a matter of seven days and a half or so?' And that silenced the tongues of them, an' made them be off wid themselves, and lave me in pace and quietness wid the blessed one, so it did."

"Kate—oh! Kate—is it really you, my girl?" said Will, straining his cousin to him, and pushing back the thick brown ripples from her brow, to look at the dear face that he had never thought to see again. "Thank God—thank God!"

It was strange how quiet she was, this Kate of ours who had been lost and was found, had been dead and was alive again. Aunt Cynthia kissed the girl's hands, and bedewed them with her tears. Miss Libbie, white and trembling, seemed to go in mortal fear, yet to be in an ecstasy of smothered joy as she hovered round the outskirts of that centre

group, that told of riven hearts once more united, sacred ties that had been ruthlessly torn asunder and were now touching and thrilling each other once again.

Never, perhaps, did a feeling of degradation and unworthiness press more heavily upon a human soul than upon Miss Libbie's in the present hour. She had much ado to prevent herself from cowering away in some shadowed corner, and hiding her white, scared face in her shaking hands. Yet under all her pain and shame, like a little bird singing in a darksome wood, was a quavering note of joy.

Kate was a living, breathing woman—thin and pale, it is true, and with an awful strained stare in her poor wide eyes, yet alive, thank God—alive.

There had been times in Miss Libbie's life during the past two long and awful months when she had been haunted by the thought of that face defiled with the mud of the river-bed, of the brown locks tangled with ooze and drift, of the brown eyes, open and sightless, staring

up to high heaven, as though calling upon God for vengeance.

Then had the grand old parable of Cain and Abel, the slayer and the slain, been carried out to the full in the case of poor Miss Libbie, for she had cried in the night season with an exceeding bitter cry, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Was it not, then, joy unspeakable to see Bonnie Kate once more within the sacred precincts of the home from which she had been driven? Was it not almost more privilege than she was worthy of to unclasp the long black cloak from about her neck, to chafe the chill hands, and hold the tray—Heaven knows how she steadied her poor hand to hold it at all—upon which stood the glass of wine and the dainty cake that Will and Aunt Cynthia coaxed the traveller into taking by sips and bits, talking to her all the time of John, John, John, her husband, her lover, her sweetheart?

It was strange, indeed, how few questions anyone put to her about herself. Curiosity

and wonder alike died before the supreme interest and absorbing anxiety of the hour. They almost forgot to wonder where she had come from—in what corner of the earth she had been hidden from their eyes so long—in the joy that possessed them at the sight of her, the touch of her, the hearing of her.

They did not even say, “What voice called you? What strange presence warned you that your dear one lay stricken down by the hand of a sore sickness, and that on his parched and blackened lips was for ever the name, ‘Kate—my Kate—Bonnie Kate’?” Everything was so strange that nothing seemed impossible—nothing beyond belief. Nothing stood in need of explanation, since explanation would have been too stupendous to face.

And Kate herself assisted not a little towards this state of affairs by offering no solution of the mystery that enveloped her—by speaking even of “little son” as if it were a matter of course that everybody knew all about him, and nobody was in the least astonished at him. The calm way in which “little son” himself

looked at everybody with great, grave eyes, the exact counterpart of John's own, may also have helped him towards thus quietly taking his place in the family circle as though he had been born to it like other babies, and never sat on Biddie's lap under the far-off cedar tree while Friend Benjamin played five plaintive notes on his woodland flute.

Kate spoke in a quiet, even voice that was like oil on the waters of excitement and unrest seething about her.

When the principal actor in such a wild drama took things in such a perfectly matter-of-fact manner, of what good for the supers and scene-shifters to tear their passion to tatters?

Perhaps if they had lived with Faith Worthy for two months of long, sweet summer days they would have caught the charm of her quietude and self-discipline; even as it was, though they knew not whence the reflected spirit came, they felt its power.

"Is there any—hope?" said Kate, turning her eyes on Will, and making him feel that if

there had been no hope at all their gaze would have dragged the truth from him in spite of himself.

“Yes,” he said, with his hand on her shoulder, and his eyes looking straight into hers, “there is—hope—thank God!—but——”

“The case needs close watching?”

“Yes, absolute quiet and regular nourishment,” said Will, parrot-like repeating the doctor’s exact words.

“Is it fever?”

Still those wide-searching eyes were on him; he could not even varnish or overlay the truth.

“Typhoid; and—the turn of the disease is close at hand.”

Kate gave a long, shuddering sigh, and a light came momentarily into her heavy eyes.

“I have come, then,” she said, “just in time. Now—I will go to him.”

Her little black bonnet lay upon the table; she folded her gloves and laid them in it.

Every action was so quiet, so self-restrained, that it would have seemed like sacrilege to have failed to follow her lead.

She bent and kissed "little son."

"You will see that Biddy has everything she wants for him," then with a tiny smile she turned to Aunt Libbie, who was shaking in her shoes. "I am sure you will look well after him for me, Aunt Libbie—after them both," she added hastily, as she saw Biddy's head give a scornful toss; "I shall not be able to leave—my husband—again to-night."

No one dared to gainsay her. No one dared to expostulate or reason with her.

She was gentle, but imperious as a young queen, and they were all absolute in their submission to her.

"We have come a long journey by sea and land—and poor Biddy must be tired. I would not let the cab drive up to the door for fear of disturbing John. What luggage we have the man put just inside the gate. It had better be brought in, so that Biddy can have little son's night things and get him to bed—but *you* will see to all that," she said, again turning to Miss Libbie, who was quite speechless because of a great apple that had

apparently stuck in her throat, and would go neither up nor down, the while her face was crumpled up into all manner of impossible contortions in her efforts to emulate Kate's own calmness.

She could do no more than nod her head, twinkle away the tears that blinded her, and rush off to get some milk and hot water to feed the little one, and a cup of tea and some hot buttered toast for the odd woman whom Kate called "Biddy."

There was a relief in these homely services, and she would not let herself flinch from the withering scorn of Biddy's eye, or the toss of the wonderful bonnet that crowned that good woman's head.

The look and the toss seemed to say: "It's all very well to go and fetch milk and water, and talk about tea and toast—but let me catch you interfering with this baby on my lap—*do!*"

Before leaving the room Kate went up to Aunt Cynthia, sitting pale and tearful by the fire, knelt beside her knee, as she had knelt so often as a little child, folded her hands, as night

by night she had folded them in prayer in those past happy days, and laid her head a moment on the breast that had been as a mother's to the child that was motherless and fatherless, yet lacked for nothing love could give.

“Forgive me!” she murmured, and the tears that fell upon her face, the arms that clasped her, told how truly hers was the sweet boon she sought.

It was Will who walked by Kate's side as she went up the stairs that her foot had never trod since the night she dropped the scented petals of the rose that told the story of her flight. It was Will's arm upon which her hand rested as she returned by the way that her misguided feet had taken when she fled from love and duty, and cast aside the leading hand of God.

Just at the door of the room where the sick man lay Will held his cousin fast a moment. He hated himself for being so selfish at such a moment, but the thirst to know just one little thing was too strong for him. He was selfish, *malgré lui*.

“Kate—was it Melissa who brought you back to us?”

She took no notice of his familiar use of the name; she had no thought to spare to any such petty detail just then.

She answered him promptly and without even a puzzled look.

“Yes; I saw her message in the paper, and I knew there could be no other Melissa. God bless Melissa!”

“Amen,” said Will, almost in as much of a choking condition as poor Miss Libbie herself.

Then Kate went in, whither Will dared not follow.

She had taken off her travelling shoes downstairs, and her soft stockinged feet made no lightest sound.

The door of the room was unlatched, and a subdued light gleamed within. She pushed the door open gently, looked back an instant with a faint smile and her finger on her lip, and then went in.

Kate was once more in the presence of her husband.

But what a meeting!

The dark locks she had so loved had been shorn close, and were but as a shadow beneath which the dead-white face showed in ghastly relief. The dear eyes, whose gaze she longed yet dreaded to meet, were closed, and the long lashes lay upon the sunken cheek. Through the tawny beard, all unkempt and ragged, she could see his lips—the fond lips whose kisses had been so sweet to her—the lips that had called her such sweet, endearing names. Neither kiss nor love-names would have become them now, for they were dry and blackened, and drawn apart, so that the glistening white teeth showed like a line between them.

She could hear the sick man's breathing, quick, short, panting; she could see the restless fingers wandering on the sheet; see the great swollen veins beating in his throat.

Often in the days to come Kate Granger wondered that she could look upon so piteous a sight and live. The strength and power over herself vouchsafed to her was marvellous,

and she said to herself, or rather the glowing thought glanced through her mind like the lightning's flash : "Friend Faith is upholding me with her prayers."

From the bedside a nurse, white capped and aproned—a member of that noble sisterhood who bear no medals on their breasts, yet merit as many as the bravest and boldest among our warriors—rose hurriedly, yet noiselessly, to her feet, and met the intruder half-way across the room.

"He must not be disturbed," she said, pointing to the prone figure on the bed, and speaking, not in the blood-curdling whisper of the amateur nurse-tender, but in the low, measured voice that never disturbs or wakes a sick person.

"I shall not disturb him," said Kate ; "his life is dearer to me than my own. I am his wife, and I must watch by him to-night. I must watch—you will not mind, I know—alone."

No well-trained nurse ever betrays surprise in a sick-room, come what may, and she who

was called Sister Beatrice made no sign that this sort of thing was not just what might be naturally expected as a part of the nightly routine.

“There is a bed in the dressing-room,” continued Kate, familiar with every nook and corner of the home she had deserted; “will you lie there and rest awhile? I will call you if there is any need. I was away from home when Mr Granger was taken ill — far away — and have only just reached London. Tell me what has to be given to him, and the hours, and then — you will understand I want to be alone with him — leave me awhile.”

Sister Beatrice gave a few clear and concise directions, quietly lifted a warm quilted dressing-gown from a chair-back, quietly advised Mrs Granger to take off her dress and substitute that instead, and then, after a look to see if the fire was all right (your well-trained nurse never forgets anything, no matter what the general *bouleversement* of things around her), was about to disappear through the door that

led into the dressing-room, when a question from Kate stopped her.

“If he awakes, will he—know me?”

We have said that Sister Beatrice had a nerve-system most systematically disciplined, but there was such a look in the lady’s eyes as she put this question, that the nurse had to stifle an inclination to cover her own with her hand to avoid meeting it.

“Will he—know me?” persisted the quiet voice, for Sister Beatrice had been a moment silent.

“He may ; to-night is the critical time.”

“Or—he may not?”

“Exactly so.”

“He may never wake — never regain consciousness again?”

“Just so ; this unconsciousness may pass into coma, or he may begin to sweat, breathe easier—signs that the temperature is falling—and may wake conscious.”

“Thank you—thank you for all your care of him, and for your candour to me.”

“One word,” said the nurse, and Kate

turned towards her once more. "Those two dear, good ladies down stairs, they come up at intervals—well and good; but when one stands and whispers at the door, it is not good that the other should follow, and then that they should dispute in whispers on the landing for ten minutes. You understand? They are jealous who shall pay him the most attention. The young gentleman is different—he comes in, looks at the bed to see if there is any change, and goes out again; his step is like velvet; you cannot hear him any more than you would a cat."

"Thanks," said Kate, "I understand; no one shall come in to-night."

She walked softly to the door that led on to the landing and closed it firmly with a noiseless hand. Then she watched the nurse pass into the dressing-room, and closed that door too.

Kate was alone with the man she loved, alone with her dear "sweetheart."

But he knew not of her nearness.

As she looked upon him where he lay it

seemed to her the reproduction of that dream so well remembered in its vivid realism. The noble, chiselled outline of the face, the classical fall of the head, the thoughtful brow, and deep-set eyes under the heavily marked brows; was there a line or a touch that had not been graven on her heart long since?

Dare she touch the restless hand ever so gently, or must she curb the passion of tenderness within her, as one curbs a riotous steed with bit and bridle? Must she deny herself all sweetness of contact—she who had starved so long? Must she sit there by his side as some kindly hireling might? and, oh God! might it be that the dear eyes should never unclose to look upon her and know her? Might it be that her terrible vigil should end only in the bitterness of death, and John Granger go down to the silence of the grave, never knowing that Kate, his erring and repentant wife, had come back to him?

Could it be that her life should be fated to hold such unspeakable depths of anguish? And yet, if God so willed to filled her cup of

sorrow even to overflowing, whom had she to blame save her wild, undisciplined self, her own wayward, impatient heart, her own wilful disloyalty and unfaithfulness ?

It is possible that the Kate of the olden time might have flung herself, in the passion of her pain, on her knees beside the sick man's bed, and by her sobs and sighing troubled and disturbed the quiet that was the one hope of life for him. But the Kate who had drunk deep of the spirit that reigned at Dromore was bound to take a more selfless course ; had herself more thoroughly in hand ; could look upon things with a calmer eye and a clearer brain.

If Friend Benjamin had seen Kate seated, calm and quiet, by her husband's side, her hands folded on her lap, her eyes, tearless and wistful, watching — watching all through the long night, he would have said : “ She is talking to the stars.”

The highest form of penitence and prayer is not that which beats the breast and tears the hair, but that which, like an erring child,

comes in all simplicity and trust to the feet of God, and not in fear, but in love, yields itself up to the guidance too long forsaken.

More than once during that night of loving service and silent watching did Kate's thoughts wander to the chapel by the sea—to the long, low shore where the kittiwakes called to one another in the distance, and the little waves sobbed upon the sand. She thought of the light that was ever burning, and the voices of the singers floating out across the sea. . . .

“*Lucis Creator optime,
Lucem dierum proferens. . . .*”

Light, light, light — that was what she yearned and craved for now ; the dawn of a new day ; the dawn of hope, of life, of love !

The wind, as it moaned in sudden gusts round the house, seemed the sighs that were pent in her own bosom ; the rain, as it beat upon the pane, seemed as passionate tears shed over her by the pitiful night.

Towards morning she clasped, ever so lightly, one of the restless hands upon the bed, and the burning fingers at last lay still

in hers. She trembled from head to foot. It went hard with her that she did not weep.

There was as yet no faintest ray of light ; she could only tell the morning was not far away by the chill in the darkened air.

It was as though her very life depended on not letting a muscle of the hand that held John's start or stir. She saw the nurse—conscious by instinct even in her sleep of the sudden cold—come noiselessly out of the dressing-room, make up the fire without a sound, and, after a grave glance at the figure on the bed, go back whence she had come.

The time was being counted now by heart-beats, and the fear lest her strength should fail her was becoming a torture. But she thought of Friend Faith ; of the last glimpse she had had of the steadfast, tender face, as the steamer moved with slow strain and creaking sounds away from the quay at Kingstown, and the blue-green water grew between them ; of the simple gesture that commended her to heaven ; of the last words of sweetest counsel

and commendation ; of the calm, confident faith that gave her up to the guidance of God as to that of a loving Father.

And she grew calm again, for there was healing in such thoughts and memories, and never stirred, while the faintest grey of the earliest dawn began to peer through the chinks of the blinds.

Was it fancy, or was the hand she held less burning ? and could it be that the palm was damp—ever so little, but still damp against her own ?

She bent close—close over the face that was now turned slightly towards the window. Yes, she could not be mistaken ! There, just above the temple, where the hair had been shorn so pitilessly close, something glistened.

Was it the blessed dew of healing ? Had God heard her in those silent hours, and was He in His infinite mercy about to give her darling back to her, even from out the very valley of the shadow of death ?

Just as a sun-shaft, more cunning than the

rest, a beam dancing with many motes, managed to glide into the quiet room, Kate looked up, to see her husband watching her.

It was well that she had learned the art of self-control to some perfection, for in that supreme moment she needed all her skill.

She sank slowly to her knees, laying her face against his hand.

It is strange how the great amaze of waking from death unto life—of having hovered so near the world of the unseen, and then returned to earth, with all its tender ties and fond affections — dwarfs all capability of surprise in lesser things.

John showed no wonder at the sight of Kate ; he seemed content to lie there looking at her bowed head, and when she took her courage by both hands, and lifted her face again to his, he spoke, very feebly, but quite calmly, and as though they had been parted but a day.

“ Is that Kate—my wife ? ”

She only smiles at him by way of answer, and bends to kiss his hand once more.

Words do not come to her easily, and there is no need for them.

When two people have been parted for a very, very long time, it is often quite enough to look at one another, and try to realise that the night of absence is past and gone, and the day of reunion has dawned in its glory and its beauty. There he lay, gaunt and hollow-eyed, like one who has lingered a while on the border-land that lies between life and death, yet her own, given back to her, to her prayers and her longings, her remorse and her love.

The hand that she touches is lank and bloodless, and the bones stand out white and clear, but it trembles with the passion and tenderness that thrill to his heart as he looks and looks — and never looks his fill—at Kate, Bonnie Kate, his own again ! Remembrance struggles through the clouds and mists of weakness. A spasm crosses his face, but she has her arm beneath him in a moment, and has raised his head to the pillow of her breast.

“You will never leave me again — my wife?”

And she, taking a new and more solemn marriage-vow than any she has taken yet, answers with a sob that will not be kept down:

“Never again—my husband!”

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTERMATH.

DURING that happy stage of life called convalescence even the smallest and most ordinary pleasures are the source of intense delight. The little things that at another time would seem as nothing are then part and parcel of the great gift heaven has bestowed upon us—the renewal of strength, as the tide of health within our veins grows a little stronger as each day passes, instead of a little weaker.

I well remember a poor man who was recovering from a desperate illness bursting into tears at the sight and perfume of a few violets I carried to him in a hospital ward. There he had been lying week after week surrounded by those who could not understand a word he said, speaking a language entirely strange to him. What isolation, what long

hours of weary thought of absent ones beloved, what hopes and fears, must have been his !

Doubtless the sight of the sweet fresh flowers brought to his mind the beauty of the world that was about to be given back to him.

“*Oh, schöne Blumen!*” he said, kissing them as they lay in his wasted hand, and then the tears came, and he turned his face to the wall.

The poor heart was too full. The bitterness of death was passed ; the thankfulness and joy of it all made the chalice of the heart to overflow.

If the sight of the simple wild flowers could so touch the man emerging from the shadow of death into the sunlight of life, what think you was the sight for which his eyes had wept and wearied—the sight of Kate, his wife—to John Granger, as the days wore on, and each one brought with it a greater portion of health and strength ? What was it to lie there watching her lithe form passing to and fro in the shaded room—a precious shadowy visitant resolving

itself into reality as her hand lay cool on his brow, or her lips touched his hand? What was it to look at that sweeter blossom than ever grew in hedgerow or meadow-land—"little son," with his wee quiet face and soft grave eyes?

For a time of joy, calm and intense, perhaps few mortals ever experienced anything so perfect and complete as did John Granger in those days of weakness that are yet growing strength. A few words of passionate repentance on the one hand, of loving self-reproach on the other—such few words as might be uttered and listened to in a sick chamber—had passed between the husband and wife, and then here a little, and there a little, day by day Kate unfolded the story of her life at Dro-more, until John seemed to be quite familiar with the two dove-coloured, white-capped figures of Friend Faith and Friend Prue, and to see Friend Benjamin as distinctly as if he were looking at him through a camera.

When Kate left him to "lie still and rest," John would lie and ponder on the subject of

what he could do “one of these days” to show his deep, unspeakable gratitude to those simple Quaker folk who had cherished and sheltered his darling in her hour of need. How he called down all the blessings of Heaven on their heads; how he wrote and re-wrote letters upon letters to them—always in his imagination, for as yet his would have been a poor, shaky fist to try and guide a pen—which feebly expressed the feelings of his heart, may well be imagined.

How Kate wrote—in reality, not imagination—a few hurried lines to Friend Faith, telling her that God had had mercy upon her, and restored to her the treasure that He had seemed about to take—this, too, may be imagined; together with the fact that Friend Benjamin, after waiting at the gateless posts every blessed morning since she left, in hopes of a missive from Our Lady, was at last rewarded; how he carried it to Friend Faith in an ecstasy, laid it in her lap, and then stood by, with his hands meekly folded like a child waiting to be told a story; how Prue was secretly much taken by the worldly envelope,

with its pretty violet-tinted monogram, but forbore to say so ; and how Faith read the little letter aloud, and then went to her own room to “talk to the stars”—all these things, too, may be taken for granted, because they were sure to happen.

When Kate was told of the betrothal of Will and Melissa it seemed to her just the most natural thing in the world. She wondered she had never thought of it before, and been sure it would happen. They would always be like two sunbeams, she thought, shining on through life side by side ; and even their tearful days — if such days came — would show a rainbow in the cloud.

“Will,” she said, with her arm about his shoulders, and her sweet, pale face raised to his, “I can never, never, never love Melissa enough for calling me back with a voice that *would* be listened to. It was strange that I should have seen it, too, wasn’t it, dear ? For we never had any newspapers at Dromore, and I never wanted to see one ; I wanted to be quite cut off from all the world on this side

the wide sea. You know how I came to see it?"

"Yes," said Will, touching lovingly the little feathery curls that strayed upon her forehead ; "it was indeed a happy chance."

"Nay," she said, a solemn, far-off look in her great eyes, "it was no chance."

Kate had not lived alongside Friend Faith for nothing. She had learnt well the lesson that was never taught in words, yet daily graven deeper and deeper on the heart, as a motto is cut on a jewel.

And with the lesson of trust and love she had also learned that of thankfulness. It is not too much to say that at this time in her life Kate's thoughts were oftentimes one long "Magnificat." She was lost in wonder at her own good fortune ; the sun of happiness seemed to shine on her too brightly, to shine so much more brightly than she deserved, and the little world about her dealt so gently with her. No one put her to the torture of the question ; rather they took it for granted that she had been away for some wise reason, and

had come again because John was ill and needed her. It is quite possible that no one quite thought this, but they "made believe" in the prettiest way imaginable, each one giving the tone to someone else. Biddy was silent as the grave, or rather, as an Irish-woman who covers up what she wants to hide with such a froth of words as forms the completest veil possible, and no one dare ask her any direct questions.

The quick intuitions of her nation did not fail her now.

There was some mystery in "Mrs Sinclair" being Mrs Granger, in the long stay at Dro-more, in the hubbub of surprise and gladness with which her mistress was received the night of her arrival in England; but, however things might be, Mrs Sinclair would have to "give her the tip" before she'd open her mouth at all, at all. So she opened it wide enough on other topics, but kept it close as close on the subject of the past two months' adventures; indeed, she wore such an extraordinarily unsuspecting and innocent expression

if such matters were even ever so remotely touched upon, that the servants of the house were ready to come to the conclusion that she "wasn't quite bright."

In this last view Miss Libbie, at all events, was most ready to coincide, for she was burningly jealous of poor Biddy with regard to "little son," and could not forget that the Irishwoman had blown out the gas the first night of her arrival, and next day had told Miss Cynthia she thought it was very pleasant to hear the English cuckoo singing all day long, which was more trouble than his Irish brother took to be "afther makin' the folk smile wid his music ;" the said cuckoo being a cuckoo clock in the hall of a house just across the road. The incident of the gas might have resulted in the untimely death of "John's son," and was therefore appalling. Penitent as she was, almost heart-broken at times, Aunt Libbie was Aunt Libbie still ; and the little one who revived old memories of the time when Humbie was thrown entirely upon her care, because poor Susie lay helpless—the

little one who stirred tender thoughts and emotions in her dried-up heart was "John's son," not Kate's—at least, not in the same regal sense.

The same "invincible ignorance" that good Father Delaney pleaded for Friend Benjamin as an excuse for his being a heretic, might have pleaded for Biddy in her treatment of English household institutions. She had seen the fanciful light that came up in a little flame and made everything so bright around it, but she had never lived in the house with it before. Once, however, she caught the idea of how it was to be managed, she made as good a use of the knowledge as Miss Libbie herself could have done, and turned it out in the presence of that startled female with such a vicious jerk as made her jump almost off her feet.

"It was as good as snapping her fingers in my face, the way she douted it," said Miss Libbie aggrievedly to Miss Cynthia Pierrepont.

"Biddy, as they call her, is certainly a most

eccentric person, though I must say Kate seems to place implicit trust in her, and her devotion to the child is beyond question," said Miss Cynthia, drawing her white shawl gracefully round her shoulders, and taking the attitude that that settled the question.

Now, the fact was these two maiden ladies quarrelled over the baby all day long, and were very happy in doing so. Each had her own particular ideas on the way in which an infant should be reared, and these ideas widely differed. It was no uncommon thing for both to expatiate at once on the vast superiority of their several notions, each one trying to talk the other down, while Biddy listened with a glint in her eyes and a gleam of white teeth, cuddling up the baby all the while, and doing exactly as she pleased with it in every particular.

Kate hardly left her husband's room; so when Miss Cynthia came over from Richmond the battle-field was clear for action.

Biddy used to tell her mistress of these encounters, and the two would laugh over them

together, for Kate's old spirit was coming back to her, and a week of her own home had put fresh colour into the cheek of which the outline was still less rounded than it ought to be. A week ! Could it be only that since she kept that awful vigil of life and death ? Only a week since her darling was given back to her from the very brink of the grave ? Only a week that she had lived in the light of his smile, and within touch of his dear wasted hand ? Joy as well as pain can sometimes play tricks with time, making one golden rapturous day take the semblance of a lifetime, for the feelings of a lifetime are compressed into it.

What an hour, to be for ever marked with a white stone, was that in which John Granger, weak, and wan, and wasted, yet with a quiet smile on his face that shone out in his eyes like light, leaning on his wife's shoulder, walked across the room and lay on the couch by the window, where he could see the autumn-tinted trees, and the blue sky that made such a lovely background for their golden hues !

Kate felt as if all the birds in every bough should begin to carol as if it were springtime, and joy-bells ring from the old church-tower.

Nothing of this sort, however, took place, only John looked very happy, and "little son" was brought in by Biddy, arrayed in his destined christening-robe, as befitted so joyous an occasion, and cooed like a little cushat when his father touched the velvet cheek and the rings of silken hair with loving finger.

"He grows, doesn't he, Biddy?" said John, wondering to himself if every baby looked so much like a little waxen effigy, and had such great, grave-looking eyes.

"Is it grows, your honour?" said Biddy, her chin trembling as she spoke; "why, it's afther bein' a regular mushroom for growin' the child is, the saints watch over him! You can see him grow, sir, as the sayin' goes, and every blessed thing he has will he afther havin' to be let out, or new ones got for him. I'm afraid to give the darlint to either of them good ladies that are always foightin' over him, lest the heft of him overset them, and that's

thru for ye. Did he then grow, the foine broth of a boy, and did he make ould Biddy's arms ache and her back sore wid the carryin' of him, the cratur !”

It is needless to say these last adjurations were addressed to “little son,” soon to be dubbed “John Sinclair Granger,” and not to the master, whose ghostly appearance greatly overcame Biddy, and caused her to mutter various invocations to the most potent of her saints, once she and her little charge were safe outside the bedroom door.

While Biddy was holding forth on “little son's” perfections, Kate had been looking steadfastly out of the window, seeing the red-tipped sprays of creeper and the sky beyond through a dazzle.

There was a touching side of dear, warm-hearted Biddy's chatter, for Kate knew how frail was the little life that looked at her through her baby's eyes. Still, the time was not yet to speak of that to John.

She pulled a letter from her pocket, and sat down on a low stool by her husband's side.

“See,” she said, “here is a letter from Ray — a joint affair, I daresay, between herself and Leah. John, how pleased—how glad I shall be to see those two dear souls again !”

Then, without giving him time to make any comment, she went on glibly, turning the letter about before she opened it :

“I wonder why it has a black seal ? Surely nothing has happened to the young man, James Dodd. I feel the deepest interest in James Dodd ; I shall be delighted to be introduced to him. John, it will be lovely to go up home again—loveliest of all to see your mother’s face, and hear her speak in the dear, soft, loving voice. . . .”

John gave a sort of cry, and raising himself on his elbow, stared at her with wide and haggard eyes.

“Kate, Kate ! do you not know ? Has no one told you ? Oh, my dear—my dear !”

Then Kate knew what the black seal meant. She made no outcry, but the iron entered into her soul.

She seemed to fall together, till her head rested on her knees, and she shook like one with the palsy.

But in a moment or two she was able to put herself aside for the present. She rose to her feet, and bent over her husband. His pallor, his weakness, terrified her. She held a cordial to his lips; she wiped the cold dew from his forehead; she called him by every sweet and endearing name.

All the rest, all the sudden shock and horror of it, she thrust behind her.

“Do not say any more,” she said, “my dearest; lie still—quite still, and this faintness will pass.”

It did pass, but she would not let him speak. She could not bear words; only in silence could she endure.

So they sat on in the sunshine hand-in-hand, and when John fell into a quiet sleep, she covered him tenderly, looked down at him a moment with unspeakable yearning and love, and stole noiselessly from the room.

To wage what bitter war with her own heart who might say? Of all her waywardness, all her undisciplined rebellion, all her pitiful failure—this was the bitter aftermath.

CHAPTER IX.

HER INHERITANCE.

“ LORD WHIMPERDALE and myself want you, as soon as Mr Granger is fit to travel, to come to us at Steadly, and bring my little godson with you. Melissa shall be there to meet you. Melissa is charming as a happy *fiancée*, softened a good deal, but not a whit the less sprightly, and nearly out of her head at the thought of seeing you again.”

Thus Lady Whimperdale, with both Kate's hands held tenderly in her own, with the beautiful, steadfast eyes Kate so well remembered a little brighter than usual, as if tears were not far off, and saying so much more than the quiet, sympathetic voice, so much that the voice would never say. Like the rest, she willed that the dead past should be left to bury its dead. Lady Whimperdale

had wonderfully keen intuitions as to how things had been with young Mrs Granger, and was earnestly anxious to take her by the hand and smooth away the troubles from her pathway. There are women like that in the world, thank God! women who, holding high position, name, and influence, make use of all three to cover what is best hidden, to clasp the trembling hand, to guide and guard the erring feet. Being powerful, they use their power as an engine of good, to silence the blatant voice of scandal, to stifle innuendo, to make return to the light easy for those, especially of their own sex, who have wandered away among the shadows.

Lady Whimperdale well knew that to receive young Mrs Granger at Steadly, to treat her there as a loved and honoured guest, was to silence the braying of tongues, to bridge over for once and for ever the perplexity of the many as to her long and unexplained absence.

“Do you know,” she said, looking admiringly at Kate, “I really think your stay with your Irish friends has done you good. Your

face is a little thinner than it was, but you look wonderfully bright. I have always heard that it is the softness of the Irish climate that gives the women such beautiful complexions."

"The climate is very lovely," said Kate, her breath coming a little hurriedly, "and they, my friends, were so good to me."

"Still, it was tiresome of my godson to take it into his perverse little head to be born in a strange country, though perhaps it was almost worth while, if only to have found that most delightful nurse of his, Biddy. Really, she is unique; I never heard the names of so many saints in my life as the string of them she invoked on his behalf after the christening—and oh, my dear, her face of woe at having to hand him over to the tender mercies of Miss Cynthia and Miss Libbie, because 'herself couldn't go into the Prothestant church, an', my lady, will ye be afther giving an eye to the darlint, for betwane the pair of 'em they're as like as like to get his dear feet where his head should be—the cratur!' I look forward to seeing Biddy at Steadly, I can tell you."

“Yes,” said Kate, her lips quivering somewhat as she spoke, “we will come to Steadly, Biddy and all; but not, dear Lady Whimperdale, until we have been to Low Cross; our first visit must be *there*.”

“You are right,” said her friend, frankly, “but I fear—nay, I know—it will be a time full of trial for you.”

“Yes—of bitter, bitter trial; but of trial that I deserve to have to face, and that I must face.”

“My dear — my dear!” said the elder woman, with her hand on Kate’s shoulder, and somehow the two short sentences said more than another woman’s torrent of words could have done.

“It will seem as if a strain of sweet, sweet music had died away, and left a great silence in the old house,” said Kate, trembling.

“The music was almost too sweet for earth, was it not? and now, dear friend, though we cannot hear it, we know that it rises higher and sweeter still.”

The wonderfully perfect toilet, the dainty

trappings of the world of fashion, seemed to fade from Kate's sight as she listened, and in their place came the vision of soft-falling folds the colour of a dove's wing, of a gentle face close clipped by the Quaker cap.

A day or two after Lady Whimperdale's visit, a journey to the riverside house was planned for "little son"—and the rest of the party, of course, but they were mere satellites revolving round that central star.

Mrs Dulcimer was wildly excited on this occasion, and made Miss Cynthia Pierrepont more nervous than she otherwise would have been.

"Oh, Dulcimer!" said that dear lady, shedding a gentle tear, "if only my dear brother had lived to see this day—to see Miss Catherine's baby walking about in the garden under the dear old trees."

"Hardly that yet, ma'am," corrected Dulcimer, speaking as one might to a child that needed humouring; "we couldn't expect the dear child to walk about much yet awhile of his own self. I conclude that outlandish

foreigner who calls herself his nurse will have charge of him? This comes of Miss Catherine going and leaving her own luxuriant home, and never coming back till someone wrote a monotonous letter to say as Mr John was laid out straight on a sick-bed."

"Dulcimer," said Miss Cynthia with dignity, and the old familiar gesture of the shawl, "I have told you before that no allusion is to be made by anyone to my niece's—ahem!—visit to some friends in Ireland. She has been most tenderly cared for, and as to the devotion of that strange creature they call Biddy to that dear child——"

But here the conversation came to an abrupt conclusion by reason of "Dulce" bursting into tears, and requesting to know why she was born to be trampled upon by foreigners, and have heathen papists thrown at her head.

As no one tried to answer this appeal, she rushed off like a whirlwind, and slammed three doors in rapid succession.

However, things passed off better than might have been expected when the actual

time arrived, and the "heathen papist" was no more aggressive than a Christian might have been; dear old Dulce herself being, as a matter of fact, too much touched and stirred to the very depths of her loving old heart by the sight of "Miss Catherine's baby" to put frills on or act on the defensive.

What a sight it was to see little Chloe's mad excitement and curiosity at the sight of that baby!

Her eyes came bulging almost out of her head, and filled with tears "just like a Christian's," as Miss Libbie said. Then the little animal, standing erect on her hind legs, made a frantic effort and licked little son's nose, which proceeding "little son" showed the strongest disapproval of. By this time the puppies had grown into sturdy fellows, much given to ill-treating their fussy little mother, but on this occasion Chloe got the mastery over them, shuffled her body sideways in between them and the queer object on Biddy's knee, and barked like a little fiend if they offered to approach.

These droll, commonplace events are often a great relief in times of any tension of feeling, and it may well be said that Chloe was worth her weight in gold on this particular occasion.

“Look how Chloe is smiling with her tail!” said Will, as the little dog ambled about, delighted to be taken so much notice of.

“Chloe always had a speaking tail, you know, hadn’t she?” said Miss Cynthia, with her head on one side, gazing rapturously at her favourite, while Biddy, throwing aside a certain awe inspired by Mrs Dulcimer’s rustling silk gown and majestic cap, appealed to her mistress to know if the little dog “didn’t for all the world call to mind now that spalpeen of a Yap an’ the droll ways of him?”

At this everyone tried not to look uncomfortable, and failed signally, while Dulce tossed her head at the strange woman’s gibberish till her cap-strings made quite a little whirlwind.

Before the hour of return came round Kate managed to possess herself quietly of little

son, carried him upstairs to her Uncle Anthony's room, and closed the door.

We will not open it.

Let the thoughts of an erring but repentant woman in the place made sacred as a holy fane by the memory of the sainted dead ; let the prayers of a mother for her child, offered up where, as a child herself, she had learnt to say " Our Father," and first listened to the story of a Saviour's life and love ; let such thoughts and such prayers be sacred ; let us not cross the threshold of the chamber, whence they rise like incense from the troubled heart, ascending even to the highest heaven.

What shall we say of the journey north—of the visit to the old home ?

Shall we tell how Miss Libbie grew more and more pinched and withered-up looking as Wiffle, that centre of fashion, was neared, so that at last Kate, realising what a scared and trembling woman sat by her side, felt constrained to search out the hard hand, and hold it in her own all the rest of the way ?

There can be no doubt that Miss Libbie would have given half, or perhaps the whole, of her earthly possessions to have felt the train going in the opposite direction, away from Brother, instead of headlong into his arms.

However, arrived at Wiffle, immediate apprehensions proved groundless. The open gateway of the little station gave a glimpse of the brickdust-coloured pony, his wild and impulsive disposition with difficulty restrained by the wizened boy, whose legs were set wide apart to give him a stronger basis, while both hands grasped the reins, and on the platform was a fluttering, flitting form — Melissa, in dainty, delicately-tinted garments, with no eyes for anyone or anything save Kate, her dear Bonnie Kate, the friend who had been lost and was found, the one whom her own voice had called forth from the shadowy distance into which she had faded.

Jack's warm nose shoved into Kate's hand, the swirl of his great tail from side to side; Humbie's wistful, yet happy face, as he grasped his brother's hand, and gazed at the thin and

altered features that yet bore the impress of a joy unspeakable, and of the shining of a light within—these things seemed to gather warm about Kate's heart, and draw her towards the old homestead, empty and desolate as one holy place there must be.

And "little son" was such an immense attraction and excitement when the whole party reached the farm -- the brickdust-coloured one doing the distance in less time than the keen mare, to Matthew Goldstraw's extreme disgust—that Miss Libbie's reappearance on the scene passed by almost unnoticed, and a hearty "Hey, Libbie lass—hast thou come among us agen?" from the farmer was all the greeting that passed between her and Brother.

The twins were in a sort of subdued ecstasy, and James Dodd coming in late in the evening, look scared out of his life when he was presented to "Mrs John;" grew palely thoughtful when Ray and Leah told him he should "see the darling baby" on Sunday—perhaps the prospect dazzled him—and wished Miss Sweet-

apple had stayed in the bosom of her family, and not remained to spend the evening at the farm. James Dodd had, indeed, a holy horror of Melissa, and told Rae in confidence that he always felt as if a wasp was buzzing about the room when she was present.

It may be mentioned that during the course of this memorable evening that ill-conditioned individual, Pilcher, put his evil countenance into the house-place through the door that stood ajar, caught sight of Miss Libbie, curled up his nose, turned tail, and betook himself to the door-mat in the passage, where he sat down with a flump and a sigh after turning round three times.

“I’m glad to see that dog’s got more politeness about him than he used to have,” said Miss Libbie grimly to Ray, who blushed up to the roots of her hair, while Humbie had to turn aside to hide a smile that somewhat partook of the nature of a grin.

Late that night, at an hour when rest and silence were wont to reign over the farm, voices might have been heard in the kitchen,

which, it may be remembered, lay beyond the house-place. Here was the worthy farmer wont to smoke the pipe of peace, after his family had retired for the night; but this night, though the pipe was there, the peace was not.

“I’ve bin a wicked, good-for-nothing old woman. I drove Kate away from her home by my hard words, and my lies, and my mischief-makin’; I’m only fit to be put out into the street, and set to beg my bread from door to door, and I can’t settle down an’ take no rest, brother, till I’ve lifted the burden off my heart, and asked you to forgive me for the sake of the days gone by when I tended you and your little ones.”

Thus Aunt Libbie, with many strangling sobs; then the gruff voice of the farmer interrupted her:

“Get oop, Libbie lass, and gi’ me no more o’ thy foolin’. If t’ past’s bad, mend it lass—mend it for the time to come. I bear thee no ill-will, nor Kate don’t either, I’ll go bail, for ony mortal man con see thou’st fretted a deal, and paid the price for thy wrong-doin’.

Thou wert always a skinny 'un, but I'm danged if thou aren't nowt bo' skin and boans nowadays. Set thyself to peck a bit, an' put a better face on things, and a curb as well as a bridle on that there blessed tongue o' thine from this time on."

"Then to think," went on Miss Libbie, still snivelling, "that poor dear Susie should die, and me not anigh her."

"Never fret thyself about Susie," answered the farmer, a deep quaver in his voice that told of a tender spot touched; "hoo wur weel enoo wi'out yo'. Theer wur no one to worrit Susie, an' hoo had a quiet spell afore hoo left us. Hoo bore thee no ill-will for all thy worrittins, an' 'Gie my love to Libbie,' says she, bo' I reckon hoo wur moighty thankful for them peaceful days as God Almighty giv' hoo at the last."

To be told that Heaven's high clemency must be thanked for your absence cannot be a pleasant hearing, and, to judge by the incoherent sounds made by Miss Libbie as she sped through the house-place and up to the

room with the uncanny little cupboard in the wall, she felt the full force of the sting and the reproach. As for the farmer, he went on calmly smoking his pipe, and finally went off to bed whistling "Garryowen."

It may seem to some that Thomas Granger was ungenerous to his sister in the day of her humiliation, but perchance his heart was softer than his words; assuredly he never in the future "brought it up" to Miss Libbie that her sojourn in London town had been a dire failure, and the indirect cause of events that might have culminated in a great tragedy.

Once more Kate lingered in the old churchyard with Humbie by her side. Once more Jack watched the pair with his golden-brown eyes, carefully refraining from a glance at the sheep that nibbled the short grass here and there lest he should be tempted to try a scamper after them over the tombstones.

It was a glorious autumn day, and below

the hill the golden-tinted landscape of meadow and wold lay like an outspread picture.

There had been a village wedding that morning, and at intervals the three bell-voices still dropped into the valley below.

Neither sunlit wold nor smiling meadow did Kate turn her gaze upon, much as we know she loved every aspect of God's great book—the Book of Nature.

She stood by the gaunt, ugly tomb of the Grangers, beneath whose gruesome stone the sods looked freshly turned, and from whose moss-grown face some words freshly cut smote the eye :

“Also Susan, dearly-loved wife of Thomas Granger, of the Farm.”

How simple a record to close the story of that beautiful, tender life !

Kate's hands fell loosely clasped before her ; the veil of her hat was thrown back, and the tears dropped fast and free adown her cheeks.

If she could only have spoken a word or two in the ear that was now deaf to all earth's voices — if only John's mother could have

known—if only she had not died believing the son she loved so cruelly deserted! How bitterly from Kate's chastened heart rang out the cry :

“Oh, mother, mother, who loved him so dear, do you know that it is well with him now?”

Humbie, looking carefully away from the troubled face with its wet tears falling, spoke quietly and lovingly of the mother they had lost.

“She would never let anyone say a word against you; she used to speak of your love and gentleness to her, and had your picture placed where she could always see it. She told me, more than once, of—of the night before you went away. She could not be angry with you, Kate—not even for John's sake; she was always certain that there was something no one knew; something beyond what she knew herself—the false step my brother took in the beginning; the wrong he did you, Kate——”

“Because he loved me so dear,” put in Kate—“because he loved me so dear.”

“Yes; those were the words she gave you to comfort you, were they not, dear? Oh, Kate, she was the sweetest, dearest, whitest soul; I often think she reached her heaven while yet on earth, and had but a very little step to go when she left us.”

The sun was sinking behind the distant wolds, flooding them with rose and purple, as they came slowly down the hill from their vigil by the bed of the quiet sleeper.

Kate's life was now one full of the promise of a well-assured happiness. Her husband was by her side, her own, in a deeper, truer sense than he had ever been before, for they understood one another better, and suffering had been blessed to both of them; she had her “little son”; she was rich in friends; she had learnt her woman's lesson that to love fully, truly, faithfully, she must be ready to forgive, even as she might hope to be forgiven; that she must give herself entirely, unreservedly, grudging nothing—not even pain—so love be but perfected; she had learnt her woman's

lesson, and in the time to come all would be well, but for her wrong-doing, for her backslidings, and her sorry failures, she had to pay even to the uttermost farthing.

We must not leave the reader under the impression that Kate forgot her good friends at Dromore.

What had been her last words to poor Friend Benjamin?

“I will come again; keep watch for me till I come again.”

And he, day after day and night after night, used to say to Faith and Prue:

“Our Lady will come again.”

It was a quaint conceit enough how the two Quakeresses fell into the way of speaking of Mrs Sinclair as Our Lady too. They were divinely unconscious of an incongruity that would have made Father Delaney’s hair stand on end all round his tonsure, like reeds round a pool, if he had heard it; and Kate remained Our Lady to the end of the chapter.

It may be imagined what close watch

Friend Benjamin kept for the coming of his Lady; and how happily this never-ending vigil put an end to the wanderings of the old days.

For his was an active not a passive vigil. He had so many things to do!

To practise the flute, so that "little son" might be charmed with his performance, and coo, and crow his approbation; to keep the moss and the lichens from growing on the seat under the cedar-tree; to go down to the shore of an evening and listen to the singing at the little chapel; to go anywhere and everywhere that he and Our Lady had visited together (always with Yap at his heels), in order that he should be sure all the various places were in proper order for the time when she should come again, and to answer the carrier's questions as to how Biddy was getting on, and when she might likely be looked for home again. To all these duties add an entire Noah's Ark of new animals to be cut out in readiness for little son; and it will be seen that Friend Benjamin's time had no empty corners.

And be sure that great day that the simple soul looked forward to so eagerly came at last. Once more Our Lady wandered in the old-fashioned garden, and talked with Friend Faith in the quiet eventide. Prue wore the dove-coloured poplin, and coquetted in a perfectly demure and Quakerlike manner with John.

For Kate did not go to Dromore alone, and John Granger set himself so earnestly to look into the worldly affairs of the gentle sisters that brighter days — days of freedom from care, days undimmed by poverty — came to the little household at Dromore in the future.

It may also be mentioned that Friend Prue paid a visit to the house at Kensington, and that the old fire-eating General, coming gallantly to the fore again, vowed that he had found a new Phyllis at the end of a Quaker bonnet, and that “Phyllis was his only joy”; little worldlinesses on his part that shocked Miss Prue not a little, but made her smile, nevertheless.

Biddy did not return to England with

Mr and Mrs Granger after their visit to Dromore.

The fact was the carrier would not let her.

But she so wept and wailed over parting with "little son" that the said carrier was nigh at his wit's end, and burnt seven candles before the side altar in the little chapel for Biddy to be consoled, which she never was entirely, by the way, until she had a "little son" of her own, and even then called her many saints to witness that he was not half the "heft" of the baby born at Dromore in the quiet hush of the early summer morning.

As the years passed on, and other children gathered about Kate's knee, she still cherished a peculiar tender fondness for her eldest born, John Sinclair Granger.

He grew slowly and was never quite like other boys, shrinking from rough play, and loving to pore over books of fairy-tales, and to talk to his mother of the stars, and who lived in them, and if they were as bright when you

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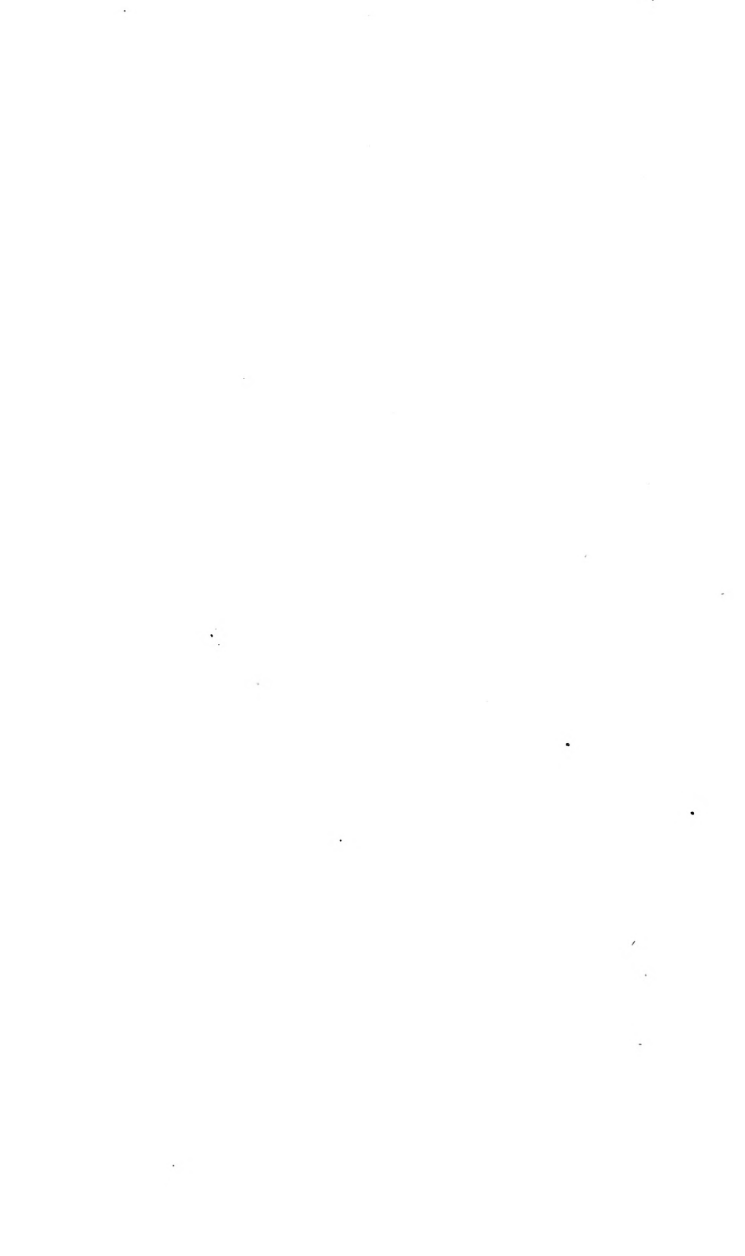
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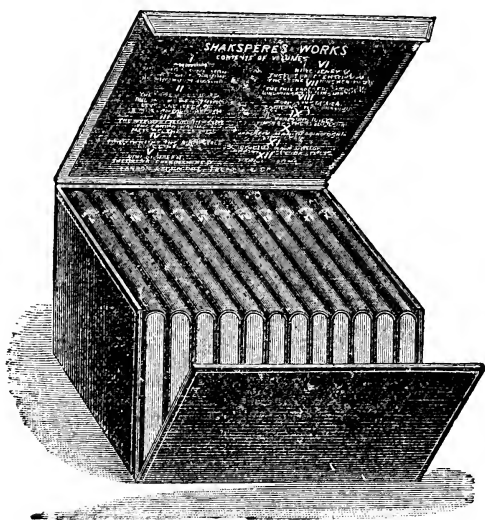


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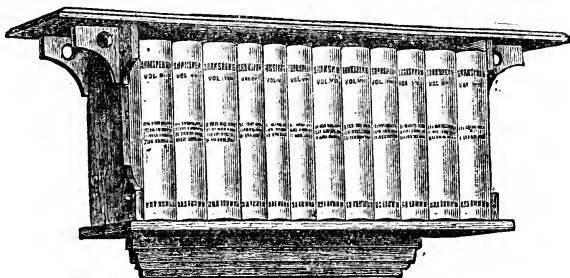
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Salar. My wind, cooling my broth,
Would blow me to an ague, when I thought
What harm a wind too great might do at sea.
I should not see the sandy hour-glass run
But I should think of shallows and of flats,
And see my wealthy Andrew, dock'd in sand,
Vailing her high-top lower than her ribs
To kiss her burial. Should I go to church
And see the holy edifice of stone,
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
Which touching but my gentle vessel's side,
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
And, in a word, but even now worth this,
And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought
To think on this, and shall I lack the thought
That such a thing bechanc'd would make me sad?
But tell not me : I know Antonio
Is sad to think upon his merchandise.

Ant. Believe me, no : I thank my fortune for it,
My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
Nor to one place ; nor is my whole estate
Upon the fortune of this present year :
Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.

Salar. Why, then you are in love.

Ant. Fie, fie !

Salar. Not in love neither ? Then let us say you
are sad,

Because you are not merry ; and 'twere as easy
For you to laugh, and leap, and say you are merry,
Because you are not sad. Now, by two-headed
Janus,
Nature hath fram'd strange fellows in her time :
Some that will evermore peep through their eyes
And laugh like parrots at a bag-piper ;
And other of such vinegar aspect

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